

# **Horizon**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART**

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**THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY REVOLUTION**

*by* DENNIS ROUTH

**BENJAMIN CONSTANT**

*by* ALYSE GREGORY

**WHY DO I PAINT?**

*by* GEORGE DOWNS

**CROSSING THE ATLANTIC**

*by* DIANA GARDNER

**SHOSTAKOVICH**

*by* GERALD ABRAHAM

**POEMS** *by* JANE MOORE, TERENCE TILLER, CHRISTOPHER LEE,  
G. S. FRASER AND ROSS NICHOLS

**REVIEWS** *by* KATHLEEN RAINE AND ROBERT GREACEN

**REPRODUCTIONS OF PAINTINGS** *by* GEORGE DOWNS  
AND FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS BY CECIL BEATON

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# HORIZON

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JANE MOORE  
VICTORIAN PAPERWEIGHT

Over a solid glassy sky  
Three paper seagulls feign to fly,  
And far below their pinions, sand  
Slips into shapes of sea and land.  
Pale panoramic views appear,  
Grey ferns are glued, prim palms displayed,  
Glades umbelliferous, and here  
Balmoral, there an esplanade,  
A pier,  
A park, a wagonette,  
All paper, pressed and pasted, yet  
Sap once suffused those creepers till  
They screened the skies, and once the frill  
Ran round the sofa's genteel foot,  
And blossoms rushed from every root,  
With blowsy flowers to paint the wall,  
Lilies on tombs, buds for a ball,  
All sprouting, bursting, falling, all  
Throwing their seeds to spring and blow;  
But now  
No leaves are green, no more can grow.  
And with how  
Envious sighs we capture just  
The grave's uninteresting dust.  
All fearful darkness, all exceeding light  
Resolve to this dull uniformity;  
Their stars have paled, their yellow sun is quite  
Gone down, their unreflecting ocean, dry.  
Behind the sun's broad back  
No black  
Mysterious voids now veil a God who might  
Loose His just lightnings from the midnight sky.  
Our night  
Is rather threaded by the throbbing flight  
Of fact, from which no morning brings respite.  
Now we forget how leisured years unfurled  
The seasons and their fruits across the world  
Like a red velvet carpet for the few  
Who passed  
And never knew  
How fast it vanished underneath their tread  
Till our glass dome was shattered overhead.

## TERENCE TILLER

# CHILDREN

Seed stirring in the womb of twilight, in the sad  
air vibrant with needles of the fountain, fear  
grown wind or trees—these as if unreal children, glad  
and losing brightness, fruit the soil must bear  
small as the ticking of a watch, as silence, move  
in what unsure vast envelope of love.

They have been sent, gifts or faint pleading letters (though  
to be unopened) into the cold unbiddable night  
—the dangerous, the tired time, the dim world of the old:  
surely the tree grows weary of its fruit,  
the womb of being closed, the child of ripening:  
surely the fountain overflows the spring.

## CHRISTOPHER LEE

# MIDSUMMER 1942

Clear and brilliant the moss flowers  
yellow in tuft and clump on weathered stone,  
on roof, on walls in the sun:  
short, haired stalks and exact stars  
in the still heat, the noon.

Time hangs: with languor and heat  
but terribly, also, now with hatred or anger  
or the void when both are spent—the dead weight  
of emptiness suddenly-understood; remote  
as hope, yet near and clear as hunger;

time's weight strikes us all with the small, the slight-  
stabbing one to awareness with the slender-bladed  
reed by Libyan spring, another in Poland  
numbed by rush of longing at the sight  
of a straggling vetch in a hedge, or a bird's flight:

a girl in a Dorset orchard watching the trees  
or a girl in a flat with a bowl of pale roses  
numbed or stabbed by time that lies  
so heavy in their beds  
stubborn as stone, sharp as this flare of mosses.

G. S. FRASER

## ABERDEEN ELEGY

Glitter of mica at the windy corners,  
Tar in the nostrils, under blue lamps budding  
Like bubbles of glass the blue buds of a tree,  
Night-shining shopfronts, or the sleek sun flooding  
The broad abundant dying sprawl of the Dee:  
For these and for their like my thoughts are mourners  
That yet shall stand, though I come home no more,  
Gas-works, white ballroom, and the red brick baths  
And salmon nets along a mile of shore,  
Or beyond the municipal golf-course, the moorland paths  
And the country lying quiet and full of farms.  
This is the shape of a land that outlasts a strategy  
And is not to be taken with rhetoric or arms.  
Or my own room, with a dozen books on the bed  
(Too late, still musing what I mused, I lie  
And read too lovingly what I have read),  
Brantôme, Spinoza, Yeats, the bawdy and wise,  
Continuing their interminable debate,  
With no conclusion, they conclude too late,  
When their wisdom has fallen like a grey pall on my eyes,  
*Syne we maun part, there wall be nane remeid—*  
Unless my country is my pride, indeed,  
Or I can make my town that homely fame  
That Byron has, from boys in Carden Place,  
Struggling home with books to midday dinner,  
For whom he is not the romantic sinner,  
The careless writer, the tormented face,  
The hectoring bully or the noble fool,  
But, just like Gordon or like Keith, a name:  
A tall, proud statue at the Grammar School.

ROSS NICHOLS

## TREES AND MEN

I

The souls of trees are older than trees  
notted narled and squeaking  
with tensile strength below  
holding out scaled branches horizontal  
and chattering woodily above.



Their dark frond-hair evergreen is passionate  
 with a controlled contortion,  
 very slowly they beget:  
 their trunks are columns clotted  
 and the pictures of the past are always with them  
 uttering silently through square tragic mouths  
 cries lasting through centuries.  
 Silent and empty are their shadow-spaces.  
 When they are dead they are not dead  
 but squeak from the ground again gibbering.

## 2

Now man is as the mouse that in the stubble runs  
 awhile and for a year living his quavering life.  
 Three times that span the hedgehog, and three times does the hound  
 exceed the hedgehog, and three times the horse the hound again,  
 and man three times the horse's life breathes in this world of pain.  
 The eldest of all living things the oaktree in its knots  
 fastens five hundred years of growth, five hundred ripens and rots.

DENNIS ROUTH

# THE TWENTIETH CENTURY REVOLUTION

'THE war is in final analysis: an episode in the revolution. We cannot understand the revolution by restricting our analysis to the war. We must understand the war as a phase in the development of the revolution.' 'We are passing through the greatest revolution of modern times. To describe a policy as revolutionary is merely to indicate that . . . it is appropriate for the age in which it is designed.'

The first of these quotations is from *The Managerial Revolution*, by the American sociologist, James Burnham;<sup>1</sup> the second from *Conditions of Peace*, by the English political scientist and ex-diplomat E. H. Carr.<sup>2</sup> Together they summarize the underlying thesis of both books. Both writers see the war not as an isolated and self-explanatory phenomenon, but as an episode—

<sup>1</sup> *The Managerial Revolution*, by James Burnham. Putnam, 1942. 7s. 6d.

<sup>2</sup> *Conditions of Peace*, by E. H. Carr. Macmillan, 1942. 12s. 6d.

perhaps the culminating episode—in a much larger process, a process which constitutes no less than a major revolution in the whole structure and system of thought of Western civilization. Both set out to analyse this revolution on scientific lines; and Carr attempts to deduce from his analysis a new social philosophy for Britain and a practical policy for British statesmen adapted to the conditions of the new age.

These, with one or two others such as Peter Drucker's *The End of Economic Man*, are the most important books of their kind written in English since the beginning of the world crisis thirteen years ago. Both books are likely to be widely misunderstood, and roundly denounced, by the critics. Carr has already suffered this fate, and Burnham is scarcely likely to escape it. Of Carr's critics I shall have something to say later, but it is as well to make two preliminary points at the outset in an attempt to clear the haze of misunderstanding which they have already created. The first is on a point of method. Both writers use a strictly scientific method of analysis. 'Scientific theories,' writes Burnham in expounding his method—and the same holds of Carr—'are always controlled by the facts. They must be able to explain the relevant evidence already at hand; and on their basis it must be possible to make *verifiable predictions about the future*.' This rule of method is absolutely fundamental. Indeed at first sight it seems so obvious as to be scarcely worth mentioning. Yet it is a rule which is constantly and flagrantly violated by almost everyone who talks and writes about society; and for a very simple reason. Unlike the natural scientist, the student of society is deeply involved emotionally in his material. Most people find it quite as difficult to achieve objectivity—that is, to discipline their emotions—in analysing the society in which they live as in analysing their own characters. What is worse, the great majority do not even recognize the necessity for such discipline. It is precisely in their power of disciplining their emotional reactions to their material (which, incidentally, is something quite different from *not having* any emotional reactions—a condition which could not produce a single paragraph worth reading) that the value of writers like Carr and Burnham consists. It is precisely by the lack of such discipline, or even of any recognition of the need for it, that most of their critics put themselves out of court.

The second point concerns the use of the word 'revolution'.



This word is commonly used in two different senses: either in the sense of a sudden and violent uprising, resulting in a *coup d'état*, as, for example, the French Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution; or in the sense of a transition, over a period of time, from one system of social relations to another—for example the British Industrial Revolution—a process which may or may not entail a revolution in the first sense. Both Carr and Burnham use the word in the second and wider sense. Burnham defines it as entailing (1) a drastic change in the most important social (economic and political) institutions; (2) parallel changes in dominant beliefs or ideologies; (3) a change of ruling class. And Burnham makes a further point. 'What is important,' he writes, 'is not so much the *fact* of change, which is always present in history, as the *rate* of change. To say that a social revolution is occurring at present is to say that the present is characterized by a very rapid rate of social change—that it is a period of *transition* from one type of society to another.' This point is important because if anyone insists, as some of Carr's critics have done, on arbitrarily limiting the use of the word revolution to the first sense, he can succeed in creating endless confusion and misunderstanding.

Both setting out with similar methods to analyse the same problem, that of the twentieth-century revolution, the two writers approach their subject from different angles. Carr proceeds by analysing the *dominant beliefs* or basic modes of social thought characteristic of British nineteenth-century liberal-capitalist society, showing how they are inadequate to twentieth-century conditions, and how they are therefore being attacked and overthrown by the revolutionaries; and concluding his analysis with a constructive attempt to reinterpret the British tradition on lines adapted to the new conditions. Burnham proceeds by analysing the actual changes occurring in the social structure of three of the major world powers, Germany, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R., and in particular the decline or overthrow of the capitalist ruling-class and its replacement by a new ruling-class of 'managers'. The parallel revolution in dominant beliefs or ideologies he only discusses incidentally; and he does not follow Carr in attempting to draw from his analysis any practical proposals for action. Both methods are equally legitimate. Burnham's is the more systematic, and consequently the more

ruthless and unpalatable, though liable to errors of oversimplification. Carr is less tidy and self-consistent, more in the discursive and empirical tradition of British social thinking, with more common sense and practical wisdom—and therefore more likely, as he intended, to exercise immediate influence on events.

To begin with Carr. 'There are certain doctrines,' he writes, or rather quotes from another writer, 'which for a particular period seem not doctrines but inevitable categories of the human mind. Men do not look on them merely as correct opinions, for they have become so much a part of the mind . . . that they are never really conscious of them at all. They do not see them, but other things *through* them.' Just such a body of doctrines, or ideology, was evolved by nineteenth-century liberal-capitalism in the Western democratic states, and particularly in its *locus classicus*, Great Britain. The revolution, says Carr, is a revolution against that ideology; and the protagonists of this revolution have hitherto been the 'dissatisfied Powers', Germany, Italy, Russia and Japan. To demonstrate the nature of their attack, Carr takes three characteristic master-doctrines of the liberal-capitalist ideology, those of political rights in the domestic sphere, of national self-determination in the international sphere, and of *laissez-faire* individualism in the economic, and shows in each case how and why the attempt to maintain them in twentieth-century conditions has broken down, while systems based on a rejection of them have achieved immediate and dramatic success.

First political rights. These, says Carr, appear everywhere to have lost their mass appeal. At best they have become, in the mouths of politicians who continue to affirm them, an object of indifference and tedium. At worst they have become the watchwords of reactionaries and vested interests. As a result they have been swept away by the revolutionaries with scarcely a murmur of protest from the masses. The reason lies in the radical change in the nature of the political process. The important rights and privileges in society are no longer political but economic; political equality has become meaningless in face of glaring economic inequality, political liberty of little value in face of the power of the giant economic interests. The important decisions in society are no longer taken by democratically elected parliaments: they are either taken by bureaucrats and experts or arrived at by bargaining between a handful of giant interest-groups, often



without any reference to the interests of the community at large. If, therefore, political democracy is to be revitalized and readapted to the needs of the twentieth century, Carr concludes—and no one is more insistent than he on the need for such a development—its principles must be re-interpreted in primarily economic terms. Equality in particular must be extended into the economic sphere; popular control by the community, as well as the recognition by the ruling class of their responsibilities towards the community, must be as effective in the economic field as in the past it has been in the political.

Secondly, national self-determination. The old ideology, Carr points out, erected the principle that States should coincide with nations into an absolute principle valid for all times and places. In so doing it ignored both the incapacity of many of the smaller nations to exercise the powers of absolute sovereignty thus thrust upon them and the impracticability of breaking up the world, and particularly Europe, into smaller units without any recognition of their mutual obligations; and this at the very time when all the tendencies, both economic and strategical, were in the direction of larger units and greater interdependence. The result, most visible in the Europe of the Versailles settlement, was the creation of an unstable political patchwork which the revolutionaries could rip to pieces with scarcely an effort. If, therefore, the principle of self-determination is to be made effective in the new international society, it too, says Carr, must be readapted to the new conditions. We must be ready to abandon the liberal assumption that the nation is the only conceivable unit to which the principle can be applied; we must insist that it be regarded not as the sole and absolute principle of political demarcation, but as one which can and should be modified in the light of other equally important principles such as that of economic interdependence; and we must require that every unit claiming to exercise the right of self-determination should at the same time recognize the obligations towards a wider society which the right entails.

Finally the economic revolution, the revolution against *laissez-faire* individualism. This is the most controversial section of the book, the most criticized, and the one in which Carr is least sure of his ground. Indeed he has laid himself open to criticism by minor mistakes which, though they do not affect the substance of his argument, give the specialists an excuse to dismiss



his whole case as that of an amateur. The argument is roughly as follows: the old ideology was based on the assumption of an automatic 'harmony of interests' in the economic system, that is to say, on the belief that, if each individual intelligently pursued his own interests (in seeking the highest profit), the maximum benefit would automatically accrue to society. An incidental but highly important result of this doctrine was the 'de-moralization' of society which it entailed; since by assuring the individual that in the very process of pursuing his own interest he was also acquitting his duty to society, and by positing an automatically self-directing system, it relieved both the individual and society at large of the quest for a moral purpose.

However well this doctrine may have worked under the old conditions, it has, says Carr, proved dismally inadequate to the new. First because the society of equal, independent and mobile individuals which it presupposed has given place to a system dominated by a few large, rigid semi-monopolistic interest groups whose interests are very far from harmonizing with those of the community; secondly, because the ideal of maximum wealth which was regarded both as the *summum bonum* and the automatic result of the old system has long since been superseded in the minds of the masses by other ideals, ideals of 'welfare', such as stable employment and a juster system of distribution, which the old system based on the profit motive is totally incompetent to achieve; and thirdly, because the supremacy of the individual consumer, which the old system was supposed to guarantee, has been entirely undermined by the development of large-scale combinations (both of capital and labour) on the producer side without any corresponding organization of the consumer to offset them; with the result that this producer-dominated system has disastrously broken down at the consumer end and tottered from one crisis to another of 'under-consumption'. Meanwhile the ordinary man, faced with the inadequacy of the profit motive as the sole incentive in society and with the urgent need for a social purpose to replace the automatically determined objective of maximum wealth, has become conscious of a yawning moral vacuum. The result is a moral crisis of the first order.

For all these economic problems the revolutionaries have found their totalitarian solution. To each Carr puts forward a democratic alternative. First, he says, we must once and for all abandon

the myth of the rugged individual promoting the common good in his search for profit, recognize the predominance in our economic life of the great vested interests and organizations, and ensure that those organizations are brought under proper public control. Secondly, we must acknowledge the supremacy of the ideals of 'welfare' over those of mere wealth, and direct our main efforts to achieving them, particularly as regards full employment and fairer distribution, irrespective of considerations of profit. Thirdly, we must end the domination of the producer interest by embarking in peace (as we have embarked for other purposes in war, with striking success) on a system of planned consumption, designed to fulfil the basic needs of ordinary people both in our own country and wherever else our responsibilities may extend. And finally we must find for our society a common moral purpose as compelling in peacetime as the common will to victory has proved in war.

So much for Carr. Now one word on his critics. These have been both voluminous and violent. The *Nineteenth Century*, for instance, has fulfilled the expectations of its title by devoting two long essays to the discomfiture of this *enfant terrible* of the twentieth. Miss Rebecca West has contributed two equally long and equally indignant articles in *Time and Tide* to the same cause. In their anxiety to rush to the defence of the *status quo*, however, most of the critics have generated more heat than light; and the heat has too often prevented them from reading Carr with sufficient care to grasp the nature of his attack. Thus Miss West accuses him of wanting to dispense entirely with the principle of self-determination. In fact, as we have seen, he wants to do nothing of the sort. He is merely concerned to state the conditions within which alone, in the light of twentieth-century conditions, the best hope of retaining the principle resides. In such an argument, as in many others which the critics have adduced, there is only one test which matters: given the realities of the situation, whose policy is most likely to produce the results which both desire: Carr's, which is based on the subordination of his own desires to those realities, or Miss West's, which is based on an attempt to subordinate the realities to her own desires?

All such criticisms display one characteristic which, since it is likely to be in evidence in other controversies of the same sort, is worth closer analysis. It is that while the substance of their arguments

in defence of the old order is disappointingly small, the amount of emotion which they generate in the process is strikingly large. For this there are several explanations. Some of the critics, and particularly the economists, are clearly piqued by the impertinence of this layman who dares to trample with his amateur feet on their professional reserves, particularly when he presumes to say that under the new dispensation there will no longer be room, as under the old, for the continued existence of economics as a separate and independent science. This attitude, while understandable, deserves no sympathy. The exclusiveness of the specialists in various fields, and not least in that of economics, has been one of the more pernicious vices of the academic world in recent years; and one can only be grateful to Carr for the courage of his intrusion on this front.

Then there are the critics who, having long regarded themselves as leaders of progressive thought, are outraged to find themselves classed by Carr as high priests of conservatism and reaction. Their indignation usually takes the form of pointing out that all Carr says is either wrong or else a mere plagiarism of what they have been saying for years, only no one would listen.

But there is one reason more fundamental than any of these for the emotional tensivity of the critics' reactions. Carr, as we have seen, is not merely dealing in the surface day-to-day current of ideas. He is pulling up and investigating the *roots* of those ideas. Now this uprooting of basic ideas is apt to be a painful process for their owners. They have become fixed mental habits, set about with emotional associations. To disturb them is to invite, from anyone not trained to constant self-analysis, reactions of a violent kind. Yet the very violence of his reaction is enough to disqualify the critic from making any serious contribution to the discussion, for it only shows his incapacity to apply that scientific method, that testing of each assumption by the facts, which the objective study of society demands.

Effective criticism of Carr's, or of any other such analysis, must meet him with his own methods and on his own ground. On this basis he is open to legitimate criticism, not for any major error of argument or interpretation of the facts, but for the incompleteness of his analysis. A revolution, in the broad sense in which he uses the word, must entail something more than changes, however radical, in systems of thought. For these in their



turn are derivative from changes of another kind, changes in technical conditions and the structure of society itself. This Carr would readily admit; indeed much of his analysis is devoted to these more basic changes. But the angle of his approach prevents him from analysing them systematically, with the result that his picture of the revolution is apt to be blurred and imprecise.

To take one key example. While telling us clearly that the revolution is a revolution against capitalism and capitalists, Carr does not tell us who are its social leaders, that is to say who constitute the new ruling-class; or what changes in the technique of production and social organization have led to their emergence. Is it the proletariat? or the *petite bourgeoisie*? Carr himself is in doubt. 'It would be foolish,' he writes, 'to hazard any guess as to the social stratum from which the new leadership will be drawn.' He even seems doubtful whether there will be a new ruling-class at all, for at one point he talks as if 'the masses' will themselves be the new rulers.

These are points of key importance. They are points on which Burnham, starting from precisely the same hypothesis as Carr, namely, the demise of the capitalist class and of liberal-capitalist ideology, has a clear and unequivocal answer. In the first place he is quite clear that the capitalist class will be superseded, not by a 'classless society', but by another ruling-class. This point is so fundamental, and to many so unpalatable, that it calls for further analysis. A 'ruling-class', Burnham defines, on Marxian lines, as that class which, as against the rest of society, has both a preponderant control in the instruments of production (in the widest sense, including for example control of the public services) and a preferential share in their product. The capitalists were clearly such a class, exercising their power by their private ownership of the means of production. The reason Burnham gives for supposing that they will be replaced, not by a classless society, but by another ruling-class is this: the processes of production and social administration are now so complex that they call for a very high order of skill in their controllers. That skill can only be attained by a strictly limited number of people, and certainly not by the masses as a whole. There is thus a strong presumption, based on a study of modern technical conditions, in favour of the emergence of a new ruling-class. And that presumption is borne out

by the factual evidence. There is one movement which has consistently advocated the ideal of a 'classless society'—the socialist. That movement has, in every country save one, failed to achieve effective power altogether, power either remaining with the capitalists or passing into quite different hands. In the one country where it has achieved power, namely the U.S.S.R., the ideal of a classless society was almost instantly abandoned in favour of the creation of a ruling-class more powerful than in almost any other society.

Who then constitute this new ruling-class who are to replace—who in some countries have already replaced—the capitalists? Turning to his own country, America, and examining the structure of large-scale industry there, he finds that the key men, the men actually running the show, are no longer either the big capitalists themselves, who have largely abdicated and retired to their yachts, and whose remaining functions are in any case quite secondary; nor the shareholders, whose participation in the productive process has been reduced to a mere formality; still less the workers, who are concerned only with the protection of their own interests. The key men are the salaried executives or managers, the men who plan, organize and administer the actual processes of production.

Turning then to the State, which in some countries such as Germany and the U.S.S.R. already controls the entire economic machine, and which even in countries such as Britain and the U.S.A. is coming to extend its control over wider and wider sections of economic and social life, he finds once again that the key men are the administrators, planners, managers—first cousins of the salaried executives in large-scale industry. In the State as in business it is the 'managers' who are coming to the top, exercising their power not, like the capitalist, by direct ownership of the means of production, but by a monopoly of the managerial skill which alone under modern conditions ensures effective control of them. It is the managers who, whatever the outward political form of the community, whether Communist, Fascist, or Democratic, are emerging as the new ruling-class. The process is furthest advanced in Russia and Germany, where it was the effect if not the intention of their respective revolutions to hasten it. In America it has been given a powerful stimulus by the New Deal; even in Britain, where it still lags behind owing

to the traditional prestige of capitalism, it has been given new impetus by the demands of total war.

Parallel with this phenomenon of the emergence of a new ruling-class, Burnham sees two other major processes at work: first—and here his argument is closely parallel with Carr's—the discrediting of capitalist ideology and its supersession by a new, 'managerial', ideology; and secondly, as a further result of changing technical conditions, a radical reshaping of world power-groupings. Here, too, Burnham's thesis is similar to Carr's, though more explicit, and—for Englishmen—more uncomfortable. In the new technical conditions of large-scale production and servicing, he says, there is an irresistible tendency towards economic and administrative unification in a few large Continental groups. In this process the smaller States will inevitably be absorbed into giant political systems centred on a handful of great industrial powers; and it is this process of absorption, and of supersession of capitalist by managerial forms of society, which underlies the present world war. In particular, Germany, having through her superior organization as a managerial society defeated one capitalist nation after another, is in process of absorbing into one gigantic super-State all the smaller States of Europe. This process, says Burnham, will continue until there ultimately remain only three independent power-groups in the world, based on the three major concentrations of heavy industrial capacity: the United States, Europe, and East Asia. There will then follow a series of 'managerial' wars as the new power-groups attempt to adjust the new balance of power amongst themselves.

Such, in brief, is Burnham's thesis. The picture is at first sight a black one; so black—and so contrary to the hopes and beliefs of most of the conventional idealists—that it will certainly provoke violent protest. In particular, it is sure to be greeted from several quarters with cries of Fascism. But to call it Fascism is to violate the rule of scientific analysis. Fascism, so used, is a term of abuse, an emotional expletive, not a scientific term. The question to ask of Burnham's theory is not whether it is desirable or undesirable, but whether as a working hypothesis it adequately explains the relevant facts and makes possible verifiable predictions. If so, then to dismiss it as 'Fascism' is merely to bury our heads in the sand and deprive ourselves of all power to influence the course of events. The only thing is to accept it and make the best of it.



'The stream of revolution', to quote Carr, 'can be harnessed to constructive purposes. It cannot be turned back in its course.' But by learning to understand the revolution we can guide and direct it.

Rather than attempting to justify Burnham's theory in detail, I propose here to accept it in broad outline as a more or less adequate—and morally neutral—working hypothesis; and to ask what course of action it entails for Britain, hoping that in the mere process of answering this question, we may throw light on the validity of the theory itself.

What then does Burnham say of Britain? He appears to say two things: first that, as an essentially capitalist country, it is doomed to defeat at the hands of managerial Germany; secondly, that it is destined to be absorbed in the giant new European power-grouping of which Germany will be the nucleus. These, it should be observed, are not essential parts of Burnham's theory. They are merely applications of it made in the light of a certain historical situation (the book was first published soon after Dunkirk). Now Burnham may well be right in saying that *if Britain remains a capitalist Power* in all essentials, then whoever wins the war, Britain is bound to lose it, owing to the sheer impossibility of a capitalist power maintaining its position in a predominantly managerial world. It may not follow that Britain will actually be occupied by Germany, for—and here is one of Burnham's probable errors—it is much more likely that managerial Germany will in the end be defeated by a combination of managerial Russia (a force which Burnham underestimates) and an increasingly managerial America. But it is probable that, even in that event, the position of a capitalist Britain would be like that of Italy after the last war, a power defeated in all but name, a second-rate power surviving only as a provincial outpost of America or else perhaps as a minor appendage of a Russo-German Europe. Ultimately, of course, Britain's transformation into a managerial society is bound to come; but in this case it would come, possibly under foreign pressure, and probably in the form of a violent and genuinely Fascist revolution, like that of Italy after the last war, too late to restore Britain's position as a leading world power.

But there is another possibility. Supposing that, in response to the demands of total war, Britain were to effect the transition to a managerial society *during the war*. We should then have a situation



## DESERT WAR

Four Photographs by CECIL BEATON









in which a managerial Britain and a managerial Russia, supported by an increasingly managerial America, would be fighting to defeat the attempt of managerial Germany to control Europe. The issue between Britain and Germany would no longer be one of managerialism *versus* capitalism, with its inevitable result in the defeat of capitalism. It would be a 'managerial war', a conflict of one *type* of managerialism against another. And in Europe—and granted the validity of Burnham's thesis that in the new technical conditions Europe is bound to remain a single power unit, whoever the victors—the issue would be whether Europe was to be unified by the German, or by the Anglo-American-Soviet type of managerialism, by a totalitarian or by a democratic type.

In such a conflict Nazi Germany, for all the advantages she has hitherto enjoyed thanks to her earlier adoption of managerial techniques, suffers from two basic and irremediable weaknesses. Firstly, the peculiar form which for historical reasons her managerial ideology has taken, with its doctrine of racial domination, renders her palpably incapable of reconciling the non-German peoples in Europe to the prospects of a Europe united under German rule. Nor is this merely a matter of ideology. It is a question of managerial technique; for the problem of securing the goodwill of the heterogeneous masses over whom the new power units will extend is a technical problem of management. Failure to solve it entails basic weakness, since it must ultimately lead, through apathy, sabotage and open revolt, to the breakdown of the whole system—a process already at work in German Europe. Secondly, and again for historical reasons, the arrogance and the belief in force characteristic of Nazi ideology make it very difficult for Nazi Germany to reach any lasting accommodation with the other world power-groupings. Indeed Germany has already committed the probably fatal blunder of uniting against herself both Russia and America as well as Britain. This again is a fatal weakness, since, to put it at the very least, it is vital for the new power-groupings to be able through their diplomacy to gain for themselves periods of peace in which to consolidate their new systems.

In both these respects, and in one other, a managerial Britain would enjoy inestimable advantages. Thanks to her democratic outlook and her long democratic tradition she has unique experience in the technique of securing the goodwill and indeed the



active participation in her undertakings of people of every class, creed and race (consider for example the case of the Maltese in this war). Through her long experience of diplomacy as a world power, and her natural preference for settling disputes by discussion rather than by force, she has outstanding skill in the techniques of negotiation and adjustment which will be needed to ensure peaceful relations between the new power-groups. And finally—and here she has an advantage which neither Germany nor any other European power can ever hope to attain—she has the possibility thanks to her geographical and historical position of playing a unique rôle in world affairs as the vital bridge between Europe and the world overseas, between the old world and the new, between the past and the future.

In short, a managerial Britain could play in the new Europe a rôle of leadership which might well open up for her the greatest period in her history. Indeed, in an increasingly managerial world of giant power-groups, a world in which colonial empires of the old capitalist type, such as underpinned British greatness in the past, are probably obsolete, there is no other rôle which Britain can play without forfeiting once and for all her position as a leading world power.

Of the conditions which Britain must fulfil to qualify for such a rôle Carr, whose thinking follows lines closely parallel to these, has some important things to say in the second part of his book. First, he says, British statesmen and people must realize that the policy of isolation from Europe, and the concept of the 'balance of power' in Europe upon which it rested, are gone for ever. They must therefore accept the major responsibilities which a position of leadership in Europe entails. Secondly, recognizing the basic limitations of Britain's power and therefore her inability to take a lead in Europe single-handed, we must maintain the closest relations both with the U.S.A. and with the English-speaking peoples overseas; and also with the U.S.S.R., which will undoubtedly wish to exercise hegemony in Eastern Europe, and while probably unwilling to play a major part in the rest of Europe, could make any system which we might establish there unworkable by her opposition. Thirdly, remembering that the Germans are bound to remain, even in defeat, the most numerous and in many respects the most efficient people in Europe west of Russia, and that any attempt to build up a European system in face of

German opposition, or even in the absence of German co-operation, would in the long run be bound to fail (and remembering, one might add, that a defeated Germany will after all *ipso facto* no longer be a Nazi Germany), we must make a courageous attempt to bring the German people, at the earliest possible stage, into the common effort of building a new Europe. Fourthly, Britain must take the lead in shaping the new institutions about which the new Europe can grow. These must be developed empirically, in response to the actual needs of the situation, not created artificially in accordance with some Utopian blue-print; and because the urgent needs will be primarily economic and social, they must grow first in the fields of economic and social reconstruction—European Reconstruction Commissions, Food and Transport Commissions, and above all, a European Planning Authority.

And if these institutions are to work, one other thing will be necessary which Carr does not mention, but which, if we accept Burnham's analysis as sound, will be the most vital of all, and that is a new *European Ruling Class*. That class must possess a peculiar combination of qualities: it must possess *both* the 'managerial' efficiency characteristic of the German *and* the democratic outlook and sense of public service of the Englishman. Drawn from every nation in Europe, France and Greece, Spain and Sweden, Germany and Italy, as well as Britain, it must have a European outlook and a loyalty to Europe overriding local patriotism; and it must be united within itself. Without such a class the most far-sighted settlement and the most perfect institutions will break down. It is one of Britain's most vital tasks and greatest opportunities to take the lead (she has all the materials to hand) in building up this European ruling class, here in Britain, now.

But all these are empty daydreams unless one fundamental condition is fulfilled, and that is that Britain should consummate her own revolution. This does not mean that the British people should resort to the barricades. It has always been the genius of the British people that they have effected their revolutions without violence, maintaining the continuity of their national life, carrying over into the new system all that was of value in the old. So it was at the time of the French revolutionary wars, when Britain, apparently the protagonist of the old Europe in its resistance to the revolutionary armies of Napoleon, was all the time quietly carrying through her own revolution at home, and

thus found herself after the defeat of Napoleon the leading power of Europe, indeed the leader of the progressive and liberal forces in Europe against the forces of feudalism and reaction which Napoleon too had challenged. So it must be again when the forces of revolutionary Hitlerism have been defeated. Britain, standing for what is best in the revolution and at the same time for the maintenance of continuity with the past, must fit herself by radical changes at home to become the leader of all the progressive forces in Europe.

Those changes—let us be clear about this—are already taking place in Britain under pressure of war. The revolution in our national life is already far advanced beneath the surface. A younger generation of men is coming up, administrators and technicians in the government service; managers, organizers, technicians in industry or the trades unions; planners and organizers in the armed forces. These men—and women—are winning new and invaluable experience in the techniques of large-scale organization and planning which will be needed in the new system; they are people with a strong sense of service to the community and strong democratic convictions, and at the same time with the growing self-confidence, will to power and determination to get results, which must characterize Britain's new ruling-class. What they still need is a clear and coherent philosophy of action; and conscious political leadership.

That philosophy Carr has attempted to define in summarizing his conclusions. The new faith, he tells us, must be positive. It must be designed to appeal to the little man, the unorganized consumer, over the heads of the vested interests in political and economic life. It must address itself primarily to the economic problems, and above all to those of unemployment and poverty which are the legacy of the old system; it must put new life into the ideal of equality which lies at the basis both of Christianity and Communism as well as democracy; it must put new emphasis, both at home and in international affairs, on obligations and service as against rights and privilege; and it must achieve a new synthesis between liberty and authority.

To these points it seems essential, in the light of our discussion, to add three more. First, the new faith must give prominence to the ideal of efficiency: efficiency in achieving the full employment of resources, both human and material, for the fulfilling



of basic human needs; efficiency judged in terms not of profit but of concrete social results. Secondly, it must give new impetus to the principle of democracy, not in the sense of 'one man, one vote', but in the sense of active participation by the citizen in social decisions in factory and workshop, in town and village, in church and trade union. And new techniques of democratic decentralization must be evolved to give this ideal reality. Finally, the new faith must reawaken that most constant of British feelings, a feeling which has too often in recent years been ignored or despised by the conventional idealists of the Left—the feeling of patriotism; harnessing it to purposes, such as the remodelling of Britain, the reconstruction of a united Europe and the raising of standards of living everywhere, which will give Britain a new belief in herself and a new sense of mission in the world.

This new Britain—call it 'managerial', call it 'socialist', call it what you will—is waiting to be born. It has been waiting a long time. The war is now three years old, and it is two years since Dunkirk. If it is kept waiting much longer, the historical moment will pass. This the British people fully understand, and there is impatience and frustration in the air. The new Britain is waiting for a great act of political leadership. Have none of our rulers the courage and the vision to provide it?

ALYSE GREGORY

## BENJAMIN CONSTANT

CERTAIN figures have always remained baffling to their biographers. Byron, in spite of Peter Quennell's accomplished studies of him, will, one surmises, continue to present some fresh aspect of approach to the student of psychology, as will Baudelaire, Stendhal, and Dostoievsky; but it would be difficult to find any great man, either in politics or in letters, who has been so little understood as has Benjamin Constant. As one reads over some of the innumerable essays that have been written about him in France (elsewhere he seems little known) one becomes more and more aware of how subjective even the best criticism necessarily

is. Sainte-Beuve, the father of all modern criticism, was one of Benjamin Constant's most remorseless detractors, and pursued him, as Faguet pointed out, 'like a dog after his prey'. 'All this edifice', he writes, 'so brilliant, so ornamented, was at bottom destitute of principle, of foundations; all was built on a heap of dust and cinders'. Anatole France, in his casual and airy manner, tells us that 'Joy, virtue, happiness, pride, contentment, everything withered between his arid fingers'. Even Alfred de Vigny, though he admired Constant greatly, thought he had a cold heart and was devoid of imagination. Joubert compared him to 'a false violin that screeches under the bow', and Maurice Barrès said that 'he lived in the dust of his disenchantment without ever once breathing nature'. Not that he did not have his admirers as well, among them his American biographer, Elizabeth Schermerhorn, yet even she in her scholarly and comprehensive study of him is sometimes driven into a tone of faltering apology. If one tries to trace the cause of the acrimony that has gathered about the name of this illustrious statesman and subtle novelist, one comes to the conclusion that Benjamin Constant was not attacked so much for what he did or for what he believed, as for the fact that he revealed in his intimate confessions the true state of his emotions; and this is a dangerous thing to do, unless you have, like Benvenuto Cellini, a strong and vital egoism, or, like Rousseau, a belief in human nature, or, like Pepys, a tough and racy humour. 'What has always placed me in the wrong', he wrote, 'are my words. They have spoiled the merit of my actions.' In turning back upon himself and analysing his indecisions; in remaining lucid in his conflicts and candid in his loves, he seems in some way to show up the whole human race. Sainte-Beuve disposes of both his book on religion and his only novel with the following words: 'Thus on every page of his history of religion he allows us to read "I would like to believe", just as the little book *Adolphe* can be summed up with the words "I would like to love";' Sainte-Beuve, whose mind Taine describes as 'a graveyard lit up by the dead moon of intellect', and who himself refers to existence as 'the nothingness of everything and the greatest nothingness of the great nothing that follows the miserable everything'.

Benjamin Constant de Rebecque was born of Protestant parents at Lausanne in the autumn of 1767. His ancestors on both

sides had come to Switzerland as religious refugees, and he was thus able, when necessity arose, to secure a French citizenship. His mother died in giving him birth, and his father, then serving as Captain in the Dutch States General, had him educated by tutors, selecting them, apparently, more for their eccentricities than for their power to impart knowledge. At an early age he was sent to various foreign universities, one of them being the University of Edinburgh, where he gained a reputation for brilliant scholarship and reckless living. Even then the free bent of his mind may be foreseen from the fact that he debated in favour of the higher education for women. Like Leopardi and Pope he was an infant prodigy and began his study of the classics at the age of five. At the age of ten he wrote to his grandmother, 'I see here sometimes a young English girl of my age, whom I prefer to Cicero and Seneca . . . she teaches me Ovid, which she has never read and of which she has never heard, but I find it all in her eyes'. It is the first intimation we receive of that susceptibility to female charm that was to cause so much havoc in his agitated life. Among childhood letters it would be difficult to discover any that show a more loving heart. 'If I consulted my heart I would desire no knowledge except how to make you happy', he wrote at the age of eight to his grandmother. 'It is impossible not to suffer when you suffer.' 'To think and to love', he records in his mature years, 'have always been my sole resources.' He is not the only great man to voice such simple views. 'The only serious thing in life', wrote Stendhal, 'is love with the pleasures it brings.' Indeed there are many similarities between these two famous contemporaries. In his autobiography Stendhal writes, 'My sensitiveness is excessive; what only grazes another man's skin draws blood from me. . . . But I have learned to hide it all under an irony which the vulgar do not understand.' In referring to his father Constant records, 'As shy as he, but more sensitive because younger, I ended in shutting up all my emotions within myself . . . and I contracted the habit of enlivening my conversation by a perpetual banter which rendered it easier for me and helped me to cover up my real thoughts.' Constant, the great champion of freedom for the individual, has been continually attacked because he cared so little for humanity: 'The human race are born fools and led by knaves,' he wrote. Constant's novel, *Adolphe*, was published



before any of Stendhal's more famous works, therefore it was Constant who, of the two, was the first to introduce into literature an objective analytical approach to the complicated states of mind that accompany love. Even in our own day this small book, which he is said to have written in a fortnight's time, seems, in its detachment, strikingly Proustian. It is a little masterpiece of classic simplicity and adroit revelation. Byron thought it 'too triste' to have any popularity. It traces the growth and decline of passion and the ensuing remorse of the hero. It is disguised in such a manner that only the initiated can search out its inner secret, and yet it is as transparent as a moonstone. It brought him, as Byron foresaw, more abuse than honour in his life time.

By far the most important event of Benjamin Constant's early years was his meeting with Mme. de Charrière, a Dutch woman by birth, but French in tastes and education. Though she was forty-seven and he only twenty when they first knew each other, she still retained much of her beauty and had lost none of her vivacity. Sainte-Beuve places her novel, *Caliste*, beside *Ruy Blas* as among the classics of French literature. She was complex, fastidious, disillusioned, with a 'black imagination' and an audacious intellect. No young man could have fallen into more original or more exciting hands. It was at Colombier, her home near Neufchâtel, that he began his book on religion, making his first notes on the backs of playing cards. Swift said that for forty years the knowledge of death had not been for one moment absent from his thoughts, and Benjamin Constant had, from childhood, the same sharp preoccupation. In this he differed from Stendhal, who remarked that only priests and pedants worried about death. This melancholy awareness that 'the race of delight is short', a terror of destiny that he carried always in his bones, is what first prompted Benjamin Constant to write a book on religion. He was in the habit of maintaining that the religious sentiment was more compatible with doubt than with certain religions. He kept a collection of poems on death in many languages which he learned by heart. When he was at Strasbourg, instead of going to visit the cathedral there, he spent all his hours in mute reverie before the body of a little girl that had been dug up in a state of perfect preservation after three hundred years, with roses still on her wreath and rings on her fingers. It has been often repeated that Benjamin Constant lacked a sense of poetry, but

he had a feeling for the poetry of life and showed it in the quality of his observations, nor was his mind a volatile one. In his conversations at Weimar with Goethe, Schiller, and other famous scholars one discovers a cultured and modest intelligence open to new ideas, capable of enthusiasm, and deeply reflective. The Germans, however, with the exception of Goethe, whom he admired excessively, all seemed a little ponderous to him. He would have preferred, as Voltaire expressed it, more wit and fewer consonants.

For eight years Mme. de Charrière remained the centre about which his intellectual life revolved, though during this time he married, at the age of twenty-two, Wilhelmina von Cramm, one of the ladies-in-waiting at the Court of Brunswick, where his father had secured an appointment for him. Anatole France implies that he quarrelled with her because of his fickle heart, an obvious point of view; but it was rather that his all too susceptible heart projected him into situations from which his unusually clear intelligence should have saved him. Minna, as he called her, certainly had what Shakespeare alluded to as 'the trick of singularity'. Surrounded by 'a multitude of dogs, birds, friends, and lovers', she soon drove her young husband to despair. 'I had more *esprit* than she', he wrote Mme. de Charrière, 'but she trod me under her feet!' The charges against her must have been serious as he secured a divorce with an abrogation of all rights and with no sort of blame attached to him.

It was not until his eventful meeting with Mme. de Staël that Benjamin Constant's intimacy with Mme. de Charrière, this proud and learned lady, '*mille fois chère, mille fois bonne, mille fois aimée*'; came to an end. He was naïve enough to write her a letter praising her rival out of measure. She answered with a spirited poem in the style of La Fontaine and fell back into her own thoughts and heart. She had never liked Mme. de Staël, and though both had generous impulses and exceptional minds, they represented different values. Mme. de Charrière belonged to the eighteenth century with its decorum 'animated and chastised by good breeding', its confirmed scepticism, its distaste for dogma and sentiment, its sober mocking grace, and its intellectual restraint; while Mme. de Staël had all the fervour and optimism of the nineteenth century and an inordinate amount of her own besides. She recognized two classes of people only, those who

were capable of enthusiasm and those who were not. 'Truly', wrote Montesquieu, referring to an occasion when, during an *accouchement*, she continued to entertain her friends, there being never fewer than twelve in her room at a time, 'she is not like any other woman'. When in England she was introduced to Coleridge, it was an event of historic importance for they were considered the two best talkers in Europe. He was apparently not impressed. De Quincey implies that he made no effort to understand a word she said, which is borne out by her own comments on the occasion—'Coleridge, *c'est tout à fait un monologue*'. An only child, the daughter of Necker, 'that rickety old charlatan, and very feeble old sempi-mentalists', as De Quincey most unjustly calls him, Mme. de Staël was accustomed, not only to the best society in Europe, but to dominating that society. Her effect on Benjamin Constant, then twenty-seven, one year her junior, was instantaneous. He was swept irresistibly forward in the train of this regal woman who always swept everything forward that came anywhere near her—statesmen, lovers, friends, children, servants. Only Napoleon appeared to remain unmoved. Referring to his famous saying that he ruled France with 'a hand of iron in a glove of velvet', she replied, 'With women he takes off the glove', which was undoubtedly the truth in her own case, for the long exile he imposed upon her from the Parisian circles so essential to her illusions were a continual gall to her spirit. Provincial society was not at all to her taste. Rosalie Constant, a cousin of Benjamin's, writes to her brother, 'She would die if she were not surrounded. If there are no cats she will make a court of rats, and even the tiniest insects will be to her better than nothing'. Solitude, she always alluded to as 'the antechamber to death'.

Under her tutelage Benjamin Constant developed his power of debate and his love of liberty, and he also developed his secret perfidy, if it can be thus called. Though, like everybody else, he bowed before the torrent and accompanied her when she commanded, he never quite allowed his critical detachment to forsake him. 'There are people', he writes, 'passionate like princes. Without wishing to do so, one deceives them because one fears an explosion if one speaks frankly to them'. Mme. de Staël could never bear to face a truth against herself and if she thought she was being deceived it overwhelmed her. 'I need', Benjamin Constant once wrote to his aunt, the Countess of Nassau, 'to get:



by myself without anyone being surprised or offended, or even noticing it, for with my strange weakness of character, which makes any manifestation of disapproval intolerable to me, when I see that people are silent because they think me capricious, ungrateful, I can't endure it'. And if silence could thus intimidate him, how much more must he have suffered when confronted with the most wilful and eloquent woman alive! Everyone shared in the strain. 'Today', he writes, 'she is at Geneva. Bonstettin, Sismondi, and I have dined like schoolboys enjoying a holiday. . . .'

This semi-servitude, though it filled his life with ever changing interests and gave a centre to his days, was wounding to his pride exhausting to his nerves, and injurious to the deeper levels of his nature. He was never given leisure for his scholarly and philosophical pursuits. 'I deeply love all that I find at Coppet (Mme. de Staël's Swiss retreat), but this perpetual distraction tires and enervates me. I lose my energies and ask with bitterness, when will it finish?' As she felt him slipping further and further out of her reach she became more and more distraught. 'Love between a man and a woman', wrote Balzac, 'is a duel, and if she loses she dies'. Mme. de Staël was not accustomed to losing anything but her temper. In his journal Constant refers to 'this long bizarre state of dependence, much more confining than marriage'. It is not necessary to be a student of Proust to realize that sex, both for men and for women, is reared on uncertain foundations. The sweetest thing in life is also the most perjured. Constant's mind, driven back upon itself, distractedly seeks a way out. 'Injustice', he writes, 'in the end produces independence. . . . On reflecting, I tell myself that one must act according to one's needs and one's character, it is to be duped to think otherwise. There is between others and oneself an invisible barrier and only the illusion of youth can believe in the possibility of its removal. It comes up always'. Their intimate association had lasted for thirteen years. He dreams of a life of tranquillity where he can rise and go to bed when he likes, make someone happy instead of unhappy, and be able to pursue his studies in peace. Indeed the tempestuousness of their disputes, sometimes lasting till five in the morning, was such as to cause scandal to the very owls on the branches of the furthest poplar trees. Rosalie Constant describes in a letter to her brother an occasion when Benjamin, in a frenzy of misery, had taken refuge in her house. Shortly after Mme. de Staël arrived, her

hair tumbling about her, her throat bare, calling out 'Where is he? Where is he?' When she heard his voice she fell in a paroxysm of sobs on the floor. He lifted her up and returned to Coppet with her. He never could withstand a woman's tears. '*Mme. de Staël m'a reconquis.*' These words recur often in his journal. Rosalie Constant continues in her letter, 'She declares that she does not wish him at any price to escape, that she will follow him to the ends of the world, and that if he escapes she will kill herself'. She enchained him for years by the threat of taking thirty drops of laudanum. It would seem that men and women were created for the sole purpose of driving each other mad. The deeper the bonds the more cruelly they cut. Benjamin Constant has been censured for his treatment of *Mme. de Staël*, but if blame can attach to either one in such a *danse des Apaches* it would seem more fair to impugn the one who imposes her will through threats and intimidation. 'The object which escapes you is necessarily entirely different from the one that pursues you', he writes. *Mme. de Staël* said that she had always loved longer than she had been loved. Stendhal said the same, Voltaire was deserted by his mistress for a younger man, Molière came cringing back to his young wife like a whipped cur and died soon after, d'Alembert was betrayed by *Mlle. de Lespînas*, who in her turn was betrayed by *M. de Guibert*, and everyone knows of Keats's prolonged suffering. It is a frieze of frenzy against a background of perdition. Love surely should be judged as much by its humility, its grace, its understanding, as by its possessiveness and its abandon. *Mme. de Staël* lacked 'the cunning to be strange' and the wisdom to remain silent; her will was royal and she must conquer or be slain. The whole pageant of her restless, brilliant, stormy life was reared also on a foundation of melancholy from which she sought frantically and fruitlessly to escape, and as Don Quixote sagaciously observed, 'The continual bands and cements of mutual affection are mirth, content, satisfaction, and jollity'. Just as Benjamin Constant had learned to lock up his true feelings before the inscrutability of his father's cool smile, so he at last retreated in unhappy and diplomatic dismay before *Mme. de Staël's* wrath and accusations. And yet again and again he returned to her through tenderness, through pity, through dependence—tossed backwards and forwards on this calamitous love, that seemed either to dash him against the rocks or to leave him

high and dry in an atmosphere of lacerating and shameful quarrels or meaningless frivolity. Mme. Hüber, a friend of Mme. de Staël's, writes in a letter, 'Mme. de Staël has at the moment a great distress. It is the marriage of Benjamin fixed for the autumn. She has refused for six years to marry him, and cannot bear that he can marry another'.

It was hardly to be wondered at that Benjamin Constant sought in a wife the opposite qualities from those that had caused him so much unhappiness with Mme. de Staël. Charlotte Dutertre, née the Countess de Hardenberg, was docile, gracious, and forgiving, 'a good woman and a woman of *esprit*', as he once wrote of her, 'of that kind of *esprit*—how shall I say it?—which hasn't one particle of piquancy or originality or depth, but of which none the less one would say it was *esprit*'. Indeed she was what most men appreciate in a wife, though a little old; she was thirty-eight, and had been twice divorced. He certainly believed himself in love with her. But even after his marriage, which had taken place in secrecy, and which he could not bear to make known to Mme. de Staël, Benjamin Constant returns to stay at Coppet, and the difficulties of his life for a period increase rather than diminish. At one time Charlotte is reported to have attempted suicide. On a trip to Vienna during these desperate readjustments, Mme. de Staël has a passionate love affair with a young Austrian officer, Count Maurice O'Donnell '*Noble choix de mon cœur*'. She mentions in writing to him on her return to Coppet that she has found twelve letters waiting for her from Benjamin—'*N'est-ce pas que c'est aimable?*' This young man appears to have been even more evasive than ever was Benjamin Constant. He married a young and beautiful girl and never gave Mme. de Staël a second thought. Indeed it is painful to contemplate this noble, gifted woman—so courted and so deserted, so surrounded and so lonely, so vivacious and so desolate.

No sooner is Benjamin Constant irretrievably launched in his new life than he writes in his journal, 'There are times when bitter and heartrending expressions of suffering, pictures almost magical, vibrating in a soul where habit has been to yield to them, return suddenly to rend my heart and confound my brain'. Even five years after his marriage Mme. de Staël writes Schlegel, her children's tutor, that she has had a letter from Benjamin more passionate than any she had ever received from him; and in this same

year she writes to Constant, 'You have ruined my life. For ten years no day has gone by without some suffering on your account'.

Charlotte's brother, the Count de Hardenberg, whose title under Napoleon had been changed to Master of the Hounds, owned an ancestral castle at Hardenberg in Westphalia, and it was there that Benjamin Constant was taken by his wife after their marriage. Soon they moved to Göttingen, however, so that he could be near a library, and he spent most of his time in study. After the defeat of Napoleon he returned to Paris to enter into politics, leaving his wife with her people to follow later. He had, in the days when Napoleon was First Consul, been nominated as a member of the Tribunal, but he had immediately used all his skill and eloquence against the absolutism of this '*rusé demi-sauvage de la Corse*', as he called Napoleon; in consequence he had been expelled from office and had followed Mme. de Staël in her exile. Now, though he favoured the restoration of the monarchy, he fought passionately to salvage all that was possible of constitutional liberty. Then once more his whole life was uprooted from its foundation. At the age of forty-seven he fell frantically in love with Mme. Récamier. 'Mme. Récamier took it into her head', he writes in his journal, 'to make me fall in love with her. . . . I left her, my whole life completely overturned. . . . To love is to suffer, but it is also to live'.

Mme. Récamier was Mme. de Staël's most intimate friend and had been her confidant during all her trouble with Benjamin Constant. 'I love you better than any other woman in France. . . .' Mme. de Staël had once written to her. And from her earliest years Mme. Récamier had looked up to the older woman with dazzled adoration. She had stayed with her at Coppet, and had even accepted exile for her sake. Besides being a faithful friend Mme. Récamier was a good Catholic, and though she did not prohibit her lovers to kneel before her, this was apparently as far as they were allowed to go. If men chose to make fools of themselves it was their own affair; and this was exactly what they did choose to do. Wellington is said to have been one in the long procession of illustrious and disconsolate suitors who knocked timidly at her door. Benjamin Constant became one of the most disconsolate of them all, struck down by a glance—'a giddiness, a cloud, without memory, without discernment, without choice'. His letters to her, which have been so ridiculed, reflect the state



of his suffering heart, but it would be difficult to find any love letters that reveal more movingly the anguish of this dolorous enchantment. When a person of such exceptional gifts does not hesitate to expose his innocent follies, surely it is a matter for praise. It is vain people, timorous people, people devoid of ardour who most punctiliously observe the proprieties, and lose neither their hearts nor their purses. Pride, ambition, honour, glory—all became as insubstantial as melting frost on a pane of glass, compared with the unrelenting necessity of receiving one word of kindness from her: 'I see each day the death of my reason and my faculties. You cannot divine a character like mine which can be seized by one thought only and which is devoured as by a bird of prey'. After Napoleon had made his sensational entrance into Paris he risked his life to return to the capital in the hope of winning an hour with Mme. Récamier. He has been accused of duplicity because, under her influence, he accepted a post in the Council of State during The Hundred Days and aided Napoleon in drafting a constitution. But anyone who studies his letters and journals, and who reads his *Memoirs sur les Cent Jours*, cannot fail to be convinced of his sincere belief that he could best serve the interests of liberty in this way. Stendhal praised him for his courage in adhering always to his convictions and recommended his pamphlets to his friend, the Baron Moretti, as the best political writing of the age. The Duke de Broglie credited him with being the first to teach Republican government to France.

One wonders if Mme. Récamier took a certain secret satisfaction in avenging her friend. She and Mme. de Staël met frequently at this time and these meetings were always a source of apprehension to Benjamin Constant. Mme. Récamier was just the opposite from a heartless woman. She was generous and compassionate. It was from gratitude and affection that she had refused to leave her old husband, who had never possessed her, when she fell in love with Prince Augustus of Prussia. She used her beauty unconsciously, inconsequently, as a peacock shakes out its feathers or a cherry tree buds in May.

'Time soon weans us from our darling follies', but it was not so much time that cured Benjamin Constant as absence. He met Charlotte, and together they went to England. From there he writes to Mme. Récamier, 'All that I wish is an end without painful suffering, and I let the days pass, without other desire than

the absence of all emotion. . . . I have no plan or desire to see France again. I have no longer any future, and I detest the past'. Sismondi reports that during this visit Lady Caroline Lamb made a bizarre love scene before him. Benjamin Constant's observations of English life are pungent though somewhat fatigued. He had always admired English institutions. When on a walking tour in England as a young man he had noted that England was the country where the liberty of the individual was most scrupulously ensured and where rank was most obsequiously respected.

By the time Benjamin Constant returned to France Mme. Récamier no longer had power over him. He threw himself into politics with the frenzy, that, like a red hot ember in a brazier of ash, lay always at the bottom of his disaffections. As a young man he had been wont to say '*Je me tue, donc je m'amuse*'. At any time he would have tossed his life away for a whim. He had fought many duels, one of them seated in an armchair because of an injured foot. In answer to a friend's telegram saying 'Our heads are at stake, bring yours', he at once rose from a sick bed after a critical operation, the doctors protesting that it would cause his death, and rode post haste to Paris, where he was conveyed on a litter to the Hôtel de Ville. It is a grave error to speak of his 'aridity of heart', for even his melancholy had a kind of desperate style. The least claim upon his sympathy was never disregarded, and he would give, without stint or calculation, his time, his strength, his money, his skill, to save anyone unjustly condemned to imprisonment or to the gallows. This was a fact recognized and taken advantage of all over France.

There is a portrait of him possessed by Mme. de Charrière which shows his large, narrow, sleepy, melancholy, observant eyes; his mocking, all too sensitive mouth; his broad, intellectual brow; and his long, carelessly disarranged locks. Goethe used to say he looked like a German student, with his tall, stooping figure, his golden curls, and his negligent manner of dress.

During the last years of his life he spent his days at the Tribunal, his evenings at his studies, and his nights at the gaming tables. *Sola inconstantia Constans* is the motto he chose for himself in his usual self-depreciatory manner. But it would be impossible to find any French statesman who remained more faithful to the cause of liberty. And if he was inconstant in love so was Lord Nelson, and Victor Hugo, and Shelley, and George Sand, and

many other honourable men and honourable women who were perhaps not so conscience-stricken, so civilized, and so understanding. If he caused sorrow, equally he gave joy, and for that matter, as Shakespeare says:

‘Who lives, that’s not

Depraved or depraves? Who dies, that bears

Not one spurn to the grave—of their friend’s gift?’

Of every woman he had loved he wrote with a delicacy and taste matched by no other commentator. His wife refers after his death to ‘his noble character, his heart so loving and so tortured—his necessity for excitement, precisely because it was quite inseparable from his necessity for freedom and his horror of oppression.’ All his contemporaries testify to his eloquence. Chateaubriand thought him the wittiest man since Voltaire.

When he died all the students of Paris flocked to do him honour. He was given a State funeral and crowds followed his body in the gathering gloom under a cold fine rain to Père-Lachaise, where the bones of so many illustrious Frenchmen lie flat under the sod. Here by the light of torches his old friend, Lafayette, hero of the American Revolution, spoke the funeral oration. For a long time after this Paris forgot him, then suddenly the moralists woke up and the chase was on: ‘Even hares can pull the manes of dead lions’. They fell upon his confessions, his letters, his notebooks, his novel; they ferreted out his every love affair. Then the clamour receded and once more dusty oblivion settled over his grave. Only in 1913, more than eighty years after his death, was a monument unveiled in a Paris square in recognition of his work for liberty. To our own generation his words, in the three slim volumes that contain his most intimate confessions—*Adolphe*, *Le Cahier Rouge*, and *Journal Intime*—still speak with a sincerity which only the heart in its moments of ultimate candour is ever able to communicate. Over every page of these discredited books, palpable as dew in a summer garden, is a freshness which time, rather than destroying, has served but to rescue and enhance.

#### LETTERS AND WORKS OF BENJAMIN CONSTANT CONSULTED

*Early letters of Benjamin Constant to his grandmother.*

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## GEORGE DOWNS

### WHY DO I PAINT?

I TOOK up painting by chance, and as I could not afford to attend an art school I had to teach myself.

By origin I am a worker. My childhood was unhappy. My father was a barman and my mother a waitress. I had hardly any home life because of the long hours my parents worked. When I was nine years of age my father died, and I was sent to a convent school for Catholic children, along with my three sisters and two brothers, and remained there until I was thirteen years old.

When I was fourteen I started work as a Reuter's telegram boy for ten shillings a week. But I could not settle down and I wandered from job to job: tricycle messenger boy, carpenter's apprentice, and labourer in several munition factories during the last war. After the war I started work as a comi-waiter, that is a learner, and eventually became a full-fledged waiter and worked in many London hotels and restaurants.



I was still very restless, searching for I knew not what.

Later I worked as a waiter in a West End Corner House for sixty-five hours a week to support a wife and two boys. The house only paid me ten shillings a week, and I had to depend on charity (politely called tips) for the rest.

I became friends with a waiter, an ex-schoolteacher from Newcastle who had fallen out with his people, and worked as a waiter rather than be on the dole. He was a Freud fan, and we had many discussions on the subject. During one of our arguments he provoked me into saying that I believed I could paint better than So-and-so, naming a waiter who worked on our shift. He laughed at my assertion, and I made up my mind to prove to him that I could paint better than the other fellow.

So I came to take up painting seriously, and, starting from scratch, I encountered many obstacles which often discouraged me. But I kept on trying. From the very first my imagination was fired by this new world where I could express myself and be free, as I then thought. Every spare moment I had, mostly during my rest period in the afternoon, I visited the picture galleries, museums, reading rooms, and dealers' shows: studying and drawing; soaking myself in everything connected with painting. This new stimulation to all my faculties made my job as a waiter seem lighter, and yet at the same time made me more dissatisfied. At last I had something creative to do. I lived, dreamed and talked painting, and craved to give more time to it.

As a means of securing more time for art I managed to save a few pounds, and with the help of a friend I started a one-man business. I bought drapery goods and set up a stall in Caledonian Market. There I mock-auctioned my goods, and got away from the market as soon as possible. I simply detested the whole business, and perhaps that is why I failed after three years. But during that period I had more time for study than I had had working as a waiter. Next I tried working as a commercial traveller, but the war put an end to that, and now I am in the A.R.P.

All my paintings have been done while earning a living working at something else. Only during brief periods of economic stability was I able to concentrate on painting as a creative artist should be free to.

I found that as a painter I had to study everything related to

art, and this 'everything' was really the society in which I lived. I plunged into the study of the historical development of painting, drawing and technique, interested myself in the philosophies of the East and the West, in psychology, biology, physiology, sociology, and arrived at Marxism, which supplied me with an evolutionary and dynamic explanation of nature and society. From groping among a welter of confusion and contradictions I gradually reached the point where I was able to see clearly the objective world I lived in. Armed with this outlook I could pursue my creative work, seeing things free from the subjective haze which had hitherto hampered me. As my perception developed, so did my painting. No longer handicapped by merely superficial impressions of external reality, I was able (to the extent my mastery of the technique of painting allowed) to put on canvas the subjects I chose in all their complexity and inter-relationships. The long voyage of discovery (which is rather difficult to make others understand) resulted in my work becoming more dynamic.

Chardin was my first real love, and Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin brought added joy. Modigliani, Braque and Picasso confused me at first, but they excited and encouraged me later. The grandeur of Chinese painting, its sweetness and intimate quality, aroused the desire to emulate this contemplative art, in many of its aspects so restful, so silent, strong and encouraging.

Other discoveries (remember I worked completely alone) were Hokusai, the daring and imaginative, and Uccello, naïve, poetical and charming. All these fitted in with my idealistic and individualistic attitude at this time.

During the first six years of study I worked alone; the only contacts I had being those I met in the course of earning a living. It was the encouragement of Julian and Ursula Trevelyn and Tom Harrison, with whom I became acquainted by chance, that helped me to survive a most difficult period. I remember well their advice: 'Paint your own life, George, your experiences; use that for your subject-matter.' And I did.

This saved me from becoming a shadow of Braque, Picasso, Gauguin or Van Gogh. I have an infinite amount to learn from them, but all I have taken I use for my own purpose, hoping my work gains in simplicity and directness of statement, depth and vitality, and retains poetry and lyricism.



The Miner. 1940. GEORGE DOWNS





Then came the war, which aroused me from my individualist dreamland. What a struggle I had to overcome the inertia of a subjective, idealistic consciousness, to a new consciousness of social realities, and the responsibility of the artist to the community. I see so many of my fellow artists overcome by this inertia, drugged by misconceptions, while the people are waiting for support and inspiration that only artists can give.

There are many things that can be said in the language of painting and graphic art. The things said by Daumier, Goya and Breughel have the greatest of all qualities—popular expression. These artists have realized their true function, to become the voice of the people, instruments of collective and communal expression. This gives their work popular quality.

Popular art is great art. The best work of Breughel is the highest form of popular painting. We have a qualitative change, from one-sided quantity to many-sided quality. Breughel's painting, 'Murder of the Holy Innocents', symbolized and made conscious the oppression of the peasants by their feudal lords, and the whole is expressed poetically and lyrically. I emphasize these last two qualities, because there seems to be a widespread misconception that by popular art we mean an uninspired and unimaginative realism. Popular art requires a deep social awareness, and the fusion of emotion and intellect by the imagination will provide that poetry and lyricism which appeals to the heart as well as to the mind. This is the art that changes reality in a progressive and dynamic way.

The new popular art that is coming into being will have for its subject-matter the people and social life in its many-sided realities, and will make conscious for the people their ideals and aspirations in a positive way. It will be a profoundly humanist art, such as Shostakovich's 'Leningrad Symphony', which is devoted to the ordinary Soviet citizens who have become heroes of this patriotic war, Chaplin's 'Dictator', Clifford Odett's 'Awake and Sing'. These are manifestations of popular art which most easily come to mind. I would add Picasso's 'Guernica', except that its terms of expression are, I feel, too unrealized and esoteric. Popular art does not require uninspired realism, but that realism be made more profound, that is, many-sided. Exaggeration and magnification is justifiable if we are to change reality.

By "many-sided" I mean the difference between an academic painter or realist and a painter like Pieter Breughel.

I would say that the academic painter's mind was like a sieve with a few large holes in it. He stands before an object or scene, the subject penetrates his mind and literally drops out the other side, and we have a literal, natural presentation: the subject has not been held up on the way.

But Breughel, whose mind is like a very fine sieve, with hundreds of meshes, has a many-sided consciousness; when the subject-matter passes through a mind of this quality the subject becomes changed: a whole host of associative images adhere, and we get a profound realism. This is the realism I define as popular realism, or art. Popular, also, because it has subject-matter pertaining to the people, as opposed to painting, which is mainly formal composition.

I do not use the word in the sense of immediate acceptance by the people: there is bound to be a time-lag, which will vary according to given social conditions.

In the words of Gorky: 'Popular art is art that returns to its source—the people, natural and healthy relations are restored between the artist and the people.'

The artist's sympathy for the people gains the sympathy of the people for the artist. The popular artist forgets his own individualistic dreams in making real the dreams of the people.

Just as social reality is a many-sided whole, so the functions demanded of the artist are many and varied:

To arouse the deepest layers of sensitiveness in the people.

To inspire, to brighten life, to express one's faith in the people.

To use his art to fight the greatest and most infamous enemy of the people and culture—Fascism.

You can think of many more tasks we have to perform. I feel our greatest satisfaction lies in solving the problems set us by society, and retaining our sincerity and integrity by tackling the most urgent problem: the winning of this war and the defeat of Fascism. On these things depends our freedom, our freedom to live and to create. This is what I have been searching for all my life.

No longer is it *I*, it is *we*—the people—who battle for freedom, without which all is dust and ashes. The artist has the inspiring task of using his art to win this greatest of all prizes: security from want and freedom for the people.

DIANA GARDNER

# CROSSING THE ATLANTIC

## I

IN the largest cabin of the *Florian*, in which one could scarcely stick one's elbows out, Macnab sat, with his plimsolled feet on the flap table.

'Lone Atlantic Crossing on Home-made Cutter', he read savagely. 'At this moment a neat 40 ft. cutter is lying in the harbour. It was designed, built, and is to be sailed across the Atlantic by one man: Charles Macnab, aged thirty-eight, one time solicitor's clerk, stoker on ocean liner, and dish-washer. He plans to start his trip tomorrow, the 13th, despite the associations of the date, and to reach New York in three months' time. The boat is amply stocked with provisions. When I asked the boat-builder, captain and crew rolled into one, what made him contemplate the trip, he answered: "I plan on getting a rest from civilization for a while."' "

Footsteps rang on the deck above and a moment later the writer of the article—a man named Protheroe—thrust his bland face through the hatch:

'Have you finished your supper?'

Macnab got to his feet. He was short, with a large head. 'I thought I told you I didn't want publicity,' he stormed.

Unabashed, Protheroe climbed down into the cabin. 'How about farewells at the Blue Peter?'

Macnab shook his head. 'At five-thirty, I've to be away on the morning tide.'

Protheroe sat on the edge of the bunk.

'Very well, we'll drink here.'

Macnab went ungraciously to the locker and brought out brandy. After that it was a simple matter to get him to the Blue Peter at the end of the quay.

Some fishermen and a yachtsman in a peaked cap greeted them cheerfully as they entered. 'So you're off at last,' said an old salt. 'Glad I'm not in your boots.' The yachtsman clapped him on the back. 'Didn't know until I read my *Western Argus* that you loathed the sight of us.'

Macnab was at once surrounded by a small crowd.

It is here that the young woman comes into the tale. She was wearing a striped jersey and blue linen slacks, and carried a cigarette holder. Leaving her table she came over to Protheroe and laid a hand on his arm (her nails were crimson and faintly stained with nicotine).

'You've got a celebrity here. Who is it?'

'He's sailing the Atlantic alone in the morning.'

Her eyes widened.

'The little fellow in the middle!' she said incredulously. 'Introduce me, will you?'

Protheroe tapped Macnab's shoulder. He turned round sharply.

The young woman put out her hand. 'How do you do. I'm Cora Nathan,' she said, looking down at him. 'I hear you're off to the States in the morning. I'm sailing from Plymouth in a week's time. Hadn't we better have a drink on it?'

In silence Macnab ordered the drinks and paid for them.

'Is that the name of your boat?' she asked, pointing to the word 'Florian' on the front of his jersey.

He nodded. 'Who are you?'

'I'm a journalist in a way,' she explained with a smile. 'I've reported flower shows until I'm crazy.'

He ordered more drinks. After she had deftly exchanged their glasses she had very nearly made Macnab thaw.

'You know,' he said presently, 'I can't make out why a girl like you isn't married.'

'I was once,' she answered brightly.

A few moments later she looked pensively into her glass and then at him.

'Why don't you take someone with you on this trip?'

'Because I prefer my own company.'

'How about when you're bored?'

'My boat isn't big enough to lose someone on.'

'It is—if the "someone" knew when to make herself scarce.'

He shook his head. 'No such person exists.'

'Why not try it?' she said archly. 'Me, for example.'

He looked at her incredulously. 'You'd have to peel potatoes and stitch sails till your fingers hurt.'

She answered feverishly: 'I'd do that—I'd do anything to make a name crossing the Atlantic with you. Think what a welcome



we'd get in New York'—she was very excited—'We could get that reporter man to cable we were coming.'

Panic flashed in Macnab's eyes. 'Now then—not so fast. I didn't say you could.'

He turned to finish his glass and Cora hastily drew Protheroe to one side. 'I've got a story for you,' she said in an undertone.

Protheroe inclined his head.

'I'm going with Macnab!'

His jaw dropped.

'You don't say!'

She nodded quickly. 'Here are my particulars: I'm twenty-nine; I'm an—an international journalist; I've seen Hitler at Nüremberg, and I've written a novel.'

## II

At ten past ten the Blue Peter closed. Cora accompanied Macnab back to the boat. By now she was stone sober and he was beginning to stumble. As she climbed after him into the cabin he made a clumsy effort to put his arm round her.

'No thanks, Charles,' she said firmly, with one hand on the word 'Florian.' 'Let me see the boat first.'

He opened a door into a minute cabin astern. 'That's where I sleep.' He swung his arm round toward the fo'c'sle. 'And that's where I cook.'

He sat down heavily on the bunk in the centre cabin. 'Why don't you sit down?'

'I haven't finished looking at the boat,' she answered airily.

She went aft and struck a match. Macnab's sleeping quarters were extremely neat. 'This'll do me fine,' she thought. 'Thank goodness I'm a good sailor.'

When she came back Macnab had dozed off.

'I hope he doesn't snore,' she thought, 'I never could get on with men who snore.'

She returned to the minute cabin in the stern and fixed the door with her shoe. Without troubling to undress she climbed on to the bunk and was soon fast asleep.

## III

At seven-thirty the *Florian* sailed past the harbour-master's office, going down river. They had very nearly lost the tide through

argument. Cora was below, making herself a cup of tea, her hair disordered because Macnab would not lend her his comb.

In an hour's time they were in the open sea: the little boat pitching irritably among the fast-flowing waves. As Cora came on deck Macnab was taking in the topsail, his brow black with rage.

'Don't be cross,' she gaily chided him. 'In a day or two you'll be glad you've got me with you.'

He made no reply.

The houses on the coast were no larger than thimbles. Two gulls which had followed them with acquisitive eyes now flew off at the approach of a liner.

Toward noon Cora went below and began a diary in an exercise book Macnab had bought for navigation. It kept her busy for quite a while, during which time she smoked innumerable cigarettes.

#### IV

At five o'clock they were somewhere off Land's End, tacking against a head wind. The sea was dark blue.

Macnab had spent the whole day on deck, taking no notice of Cora when she came up for air. At six he felt hungry, and after taking a long look at the sea he fixed the tiller and went below.

Cora was full length on the bunk with *The Navigation of Currents and their Courses* propped open on her chest.

He looked about sullenly, swaying with the boat.

'Have you got lunch ready?'

His tone would have frightened most people.

'As you were so unsociable I thought you didn't want any,' she answered sleepily, throwing down the book. 'Why haven't you anything more readable than this!'

'I didn't expect gate-crashers.'

He went into the tiny galley. The unwashed breakfast things were stacked beside the Primus.

'Why isn't the washing-up done?' he thundered.

She sat up slowly. 'Where's the hurry? If we're going to be like this for weeks I can do it later.'

He returned to the cabin, his eyes flashing.

'This is my boat—and if I want the washing-up done, it'll be done. Do you see? I don't want you on board, but since you're here you'll obey orders.'

She rose, went to the kitchen and lit the Primus. Fifteen minutes later he heard the clink of washing-up. His darkened brows did not alter as he munched a ham sandwich that he had to make himself.

By nine o'clock Cora was in her bunk. The bobbing of the boat had given her a 'head', but the flapping of the water against the hull soon sent her off to sleep.

After Macnab had entered up the log he turned down the swinging lamp and went above to get their position. Lighthouses flashed on either horizon as the *Florian* kept on her way busily.

He took the tiller lovingly in his horny hand. 'A bit of all right,' he murmured. 'Looks, too, as if the weather'll hold.'

'Damn that woman below.'

## V

Cora had been certain that, in a day or two, they would be on the best of terms. After all, every man is human and few like to be in solitary confinement in the middle of the ocean for long. The time would come when, after their supper of fried bacon and ship's biscuits, she would entertain him with anecdotes from her varied life.

But the expected did not occur: Macnab's anger remained. He spent most of his time on deck, and slept so little that Cora wondered at his energy. When he came below it was only to collect a sandwich and a cup of coffee and to go on deck again. He refused to forgive her.

Quite soon Cora began to feel heartily bored. To have shared the adventure with Macnab would have made up for its loneliness, but this was not to be. After a week at sea, in which they made a considerable distance, she had read all the ship's literature and, after tidying the cabin and manicuring her hands, she had very little to do but sleep. Her diary no longer allured her since all she could now muster were such sentences as: 'A gull appeared from nowhere and followed us a long way before flying off, having had nothing to eat.'

In the end she began to follow Macnab about.

'I don't mind if you keep out of my way,' he rounded on her when she inquired timidly after knots and splices. 'Then I'll try and pretend you're not on board.'

But he found this difficult because she used a special kind of perfume: when he went below from the airy Atlantic he entered an alien world. If the weather allowed he opened the portholes.

'Why the hell don't you give up that scent!' he growled.

In the evenings the cabin was filled with cigarette smoke.

When they were two weeks at sea she had a brainwave. If she wrote her life in great detail she calculated that she would be occupied until the end of the trip. It might even interest Macnab. She found a roll of kitchen paper, spread it on the table and kept it in place with two tins of baked beans.

For some days Macnab had the deck to himself. With his hand on the tiller and the spray in his face he very nearly forgot all about her.

They had yet to run into bad weather.

## VI

This happened a thousand miles from land.

After battening down the hatch and covering the skylights with canvas Macnab donned an oilskin and sat out all day and all night. When the dawn broke through raging yellow clouds he reefed down, set the stormsail, and rocked down the ladder to try and make some tea.

Cora lay strapped to her bunk with her eyes tight shut, trying to remember the names of the streets in South Kensington.

At four o'clock the storm increased, and had yet a long way to go. Early on the following morning Macnab hove to and went below to snatch a little sleep—while the *Florian* pitched dangerously amid the mountainous waves. He was too fagged out to care.

## VII

On the third day the bowsprit snapped in two and, in a tangle of rigging, seemed about to beat a hole in the hull.

Macnab scrambled below. Cora was strapped to her bunk with an oilskin over her head.

'Look here,' he rapped out, his mouth white with brine, 'I've a hell of a risky job to tackle and you've got to help me.'

She turned back the oilskin and looked out, her eyes large with fear.

'But I don't know anything about boats. Really I don't.'

'Well—now's your chance to learn.'

'But I—I haven't been on deck for a week. Supposing I go overboard?'

Just then the broken bowsprit beat an ominous tattoo outside.



'For God's sake—get on these oilskins and join me on deck as soon as you can.'

He opened the hatch on a breaking wave. Cora thought the *Florian* was about to capsize. The boat heeled right over and sprang back with a whine of wind and water.

Her heart failed her. 'I can't do it. I can't.' Gripping the side of the bunk she cried out hopelessly: 'Oh, when *shall* we get to America!'

The light was going. The waves which screeched down on them were capped with turrets of foam. From the crest of one of them Macnab saw the broken horizon and wads of black cloud. If things got worse it would be the end of the *Florian*. He looked up with moist eyes at the swinging mast. 'I shall go down with my boat,' he thought.

Aloud he said: 'That woman'll be here in a jiffy.'

But Cora did not come, and alone Macnab repaired the bowsprit.

At three in the morning the storm reached its climax. Macnab, at the tiller, was drenched to the skin. At six o'clock, in a mountainous sea with broken waves and scudding clouds, he detected a slackening of the wind. At lunch time a white bird appeared on the water. He hove to and went below.

Cora, in silence, made him a peanut butter sandwich and a cup of tea. There was a loaded silence between them. She could not meet his eyes, and he would not look at her.

All at once the sea calmed. Except for a few streaky clouds the sky was blue. Macnab slept for a day and a half.

When he awoke Cora had finished her autobiography, and was biting her nails.

'How far are we from America?' she asked brightly.

### VIII

From then on Macnab appeared not to see her. Yet whenever he came into the cabin his presence was so disagreeable that she either retired to her cabin or went on deck.

They now ran into semi-tropical weather with very little wind. Cora took blankets and a pillow and slept all day in the sun.

Once she tried to make conversation with Macnab, who now had a beard five inches long. He ignored her.

'All right,' she said airily, 'don't talk if you don't want to. Before long we'll be in New York.'

Macnab himself was not as unaware of her presence as he made out. He thought about her a great deal—particularly when she brushed against him on her way to the foredeck to lie down. He would go below into the gloom, to pore over his maps and wind-charts in private. But even there he could not get away from the thought of her: in a saucer on the table lay stub ends of cigarettes, stained with lipstick, and her odour lingered with the brine.

One evening as she was making tea he gripped the table in a spasm of rage and, half rising, snarled at her back:

‘You little bitch!’

She swung about quickly.

‘Nearly sent this boat to the bottom, you did,’ he said, with a frightful glare.

Cora was nervous. She turned to the tea-pot and filled it quickly. At any moment she expected him to lay hands on her—but when she looked round he was again seated at the table, his pipe alight, working out their position.

Her hands trembled as she drank her tea.

## IX

The next week Cora found boring. The sun went in; the cabins were soon cleaned. Macnab went about in smouldering rage, his beard longer, his hands horny and yellow.

‘He’s hardly an Adonis,’ she thought, once more reading *The Navigation of Currents and their Courses*, this time with the map open.

When they were ten days off New York she saw a liner go by, followed by a string of gulls. Wild with excitement she cleaned her shoes and brushed her slacks. She longed for a hair-set. Clambering newspaper men would meet them on the quay; thenceforward, it would be a simple matter to get a job over there. She supposed Macnab would go back the way he had come. He’d be happy alone. Probably he’d run into another storm—worse than the one they’d weathered. In which case the *Florian* might go down. She rather hoped it would.

## X

But Macnab did not feel that to arrive in New York would solve his troubles. During the long night watches, when the masthead swung to right and to left across the stars, his anger grew to

ominous proportions. He went off his feed. He went below only to get a few hours' uneasy sleep and to nibble a ship's biscuit. He no longer enjoyed his pipe, and seemed sallow and thin.

It was when they were three days off New York and a southerly wind blew over a choppy grey sea that Macnab decided to act. His appetite and his colour instantly returned. If Cora had thought more about him she might have felt uneasy at the change.

The *Florian* toppled so much from side to side when he went to examine the slope of the deck and the proximity of such things as the shortened bowsprit and the rigging, that he could scarcely stand. At one place someone slipping would slide into the sea without more ado. He went through the motion of throwing away the slops. Perfect, he thought. He looked round: the green ocean swirled past. Not a ship, not an iceberg, to be seen.

He fetched a bar of soap and rubbed the deck until it gleamed with a blue film, then he went below and ordered Cora to empty the potato peelings.

'Why do it now?' she asked.

'They've been there for an hour,' he answered, as if he had something in his throat. 'And be careful you don't foul the mainsail.'

She decided not to argue. Taking the pail she swung slowly up the ladder.

'Any more orders?' she mocked.

'Yes,' he hissed. 'Go and drown yourself,' and cursed himself for nearly giving the show away.

She did as she was told. On deck she looked at the sky and wondered why she had spent so long in the fuggy cabin. Before long they would be in New York. She took the pail and went to the side.

As Macnab had hoped, the boat tipped first one way and then the other. As it came back her foot slipped on the soapy deck and the pail went flying overboard. She followed. Below, Macnab heard the thud. His eyes and mouth shut tight. The end, thank God!

But he had not foreseen that Cora was lightly built and that her nails were long. As she went she dug her fingers into the deck and broke her fall. From there she reached out and somehow grasped the rigging. In the next second her head was under water. The *Florian* tipped again and she found herself spreadeagled on

the hull with the sea beneath her. She clambered up but was again flung back as the boat tipped over. She choked and gurgled, and cried out.

In the end she rescued herself.

When she had recovered sufficiently she went below. Macnab seemed surprised to see her; he even made her a cup of tea. She collapsed on the bunk in her drenched clothes.

Eventually she spoke: 'That deck seemed awfully slippery. I'm—I'm—I'm afraid I lost the pail.'

Macnab grabbed his cap and went on deck. He was a long time swabbing it down, after which the *Florian* changed tack.

## XI

Two days later they sighted a pink lightship on a green desert off sea. As they sailed by about a mile off a Yankee flag flew up in greeting. Cora waved ecstatically.

An hour later an aeroplane approached, scouring the sea. Finally it reached the *Florian*, dipped low and roared over them. Some heads were thrust out and several arms waved.

'Look, Charles. Look,' Cora cried, 'especially for us!'

Macnab, biting his lips, said nothing.

The elephantine monoplane roared homeward. It was going to turn out exactly as Cora had hoped.

## XII

The next day they ran before the wind down Long Island Sound. At four-thirty they beached.

A hook-nosed official ran down to meet them, followed by a group of bright-eyed newspaper men with cameras and felthats.

'I've been waiting for you for a month,' he said, clapping Macnab on the shoulder, and putting his arm round Cora's waist.

'But I must say I never thought you'd make it.'

Macnab lowered his head, and Cora stabbed her toe into the sand.

The journalists began to jostle them.

'What do you think now you're here?'

'Who did the washing-up?'

'Who mended the sails?'

'What do you think of Hitler?'

One, a little larger than the rest, wearing his hat on the back of his head, put his face between Cora's and Macnab's.



'I'm Golding, of the *Moon*. But before I get a story out of you I'd like you to stand back on the ship.'

Cora climbed on to the *Florian* with alacrity, followed slowly by Macnab.

Golding fixed his camera with three clicks, and all the other cameras did the same. Everyone was smiling except Macnab.

'Stand a little closer, please,' Golding asked politely.

Cora edged against Macnab. Where they stood the deck was unusually clean.

'Now put your arms round each other,' said another voice with another camera.

Cora put her arm round Macnab's waist. Like a firing squad the camera eyes blinked away at them.

'Now from another angle,' called someone else.

Finally, Golding took compassion on them.

'These folks are just about knocked out, I guess. How about giving them a let-down?'

Macnab sat on the hatch while everyone started lighting cigarettes and asking them questions, to which Cora cheerfully replied.

'Say, Macnab, I've had eyestrain looking for you,' said Golding, putting his hands in his pockets and rocking back and forth on his feet. 'I thought you'd gone to feed the sharks.'

'I can't understand,' said Macnab slowly, 'how you knew we were coming. I never told anyone.'

'A friend of yours cabled me—a guy called Protheroe.'

The big man leaned forward confidentially and winked broadly.

'And don't you worry, sailor. Everything's O.K. I've carried out his instructions to the letter'—he patted his breast pocket—'I've got the licence here. You can be married tomorrow at seven. Or earlier—tonight, if you wish. Anyway—just as soon as you want to. It's all fixed.'

He laid a puffy hand on Macnab's shoulder.

'But you've got to let me be the best man.'

GERALD ABRAHAM

## SHOSTAKOVICH:

### A STUDY OF MUSIC AND POLITICS

By more or less general consent Dmitry Shostakovich is acknowledged to be the most significant composer yet produced by the Soviet Union. Like a good many other generally acknowledged truths, that judgment is open to challenge. Despite the great nervous vitality of his best work and despite his equally great technical dexterity, it is arguable that his reputation really rests on little more substantial than the brilliant First Symphony, which first drew the world's attention to him sixteen years ago, and that equally brilliant but remarkably unequal opera, *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. But my purpose here is less to attempt a general revaluation of Shostakovich's work than to show how the career of an undeniably gifted, even if somewhat overrated, musician has been affected by the changing art-politics of the U.S.S.R. By showing his work against this background, which has a trick of occasionally becoming the foreground, one should be able to see both in better perspective.

When Shostakovich wrote that F minor Symphony, his Op. 10, in 1925 at the age of nineteen, and while still a student at the Leningrad Conservatoire, the Soviet Union was in the middle of what is known as the NEP period, the period of the New Economic Policy. After passing through the *Sturm und Drang* of the actual Revolution and the ensuing Civil War, political events that were reflected artistically in Futurism and 'Proletkult' (i.e., proletarian culture, actively hostile to bourgeois culture), Russia reached a sort of convalescent stage, a stage not only of relative economic, but of relative artistic, freedom. In literature the 'fellow-travellers', as Trotsky called them, the non-Communist writers who more or less accepted the Revolution, were tolerated. Even Formalism, begotten of Russian Futurism, the doctrine that literature is 'an evolution of literary forms and genres', that it is 'primarily an art', and that 'literary science and literary criticism must in the first place deal with the specific

devices of that art and not with its philosophical, social, psychological or biological contents'<sup>1</sup>—even this very un-Russian view of art was allowed to exist as a variety of non-Communist literature, though Trotsky and other Marxist critics considered it 'one of the worst expressions of the bourgeois spirit'. This period of toleration opened about 1921-2, and in 1925, the very year of the Shostakovich Symphony, still greater freedom was granted by a resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

Shostakovich's First Symphony, then, was composed in surroundings that did not differ essentially from those of a young Western composer at the same period. (The Leningrad of Shostakovich's youth heard productions of Schreker's *Der ferne Klang*, of Křenek's *Jonny* and *Der Sprung über den Schatten*, of *Petrushka*, *Pulcinella* and *Wozzeck*; Hindemith was a welcome visitor there.) The Symphony is 'pure' music and it is 'modern' music (modern harmonically, and in its transparency of texture and freedom from romanticism). It is a mixture of styles—from Tchaikovsky (second subject of the first movement) to Prokofiev (second movement and first *allegro molto* theme of the finale)—but that was only to be expected of a work which, as the composer has told us, 'was my thesis for my final examination at the Conservatoire'. And running through the Symphony are a number of traits that we can now recognize as characteristic of Shostakovich: the mosaic nature of the thematic conception (almost reminiscent of the mid eighteenth-century *galant* style), the rather dry, almost Hindemithian 'motor' energy that often takes the place of logical sequence, the cut of the opening trumpet theme (cf. the similar brass-theme near the beginning of the Third Symphony), the hopping bassoon theme that answers it (a type of theme that runs through much of Shostakovich's work from the first of the *Three Fantastic Dances* for piano, Op. 1, through the first subject of the *Allegro non troppo* of this same Symphony to the scherzo of the Fifth Symphony), the extraordinary predilection for long and important wood-wind solos, the use of the piano as an orchestral instrument, the Rimsky-Korsakov-like treatment of the percussion (even as a 'solo' group uncovered by other instruments). As a whole, and in some details, the Symphony reminds one of the First Symphony

<sup>1</sup> Gleb Struve: *Soviet Russian Literature*, Routledge, 1935.

of Tchaikovsky; it promised the advent of a composer of Tchaikovsky's stature—but that promise has not been fulfilled. Why? I put forward two explanations. One, the political background of Shostakovich's later work, will emerge gradually;; the other can be stated more concisely in the words of a statement by Shostakovich's composition professor, Maximilian Steinberg, at the time of the *Lady Macbeth* scandal:<sup>1</sup>

'A number of speakers have referred to Shostakovich's First Symphony as one of his best works, but no one has reminded us that this Symphony was written in the Conservatoire class. The First Symphony, the highest possible expression of his talent, is the result of his study in the Conservatoire. I was very distressed by Shostakovich's published allegation that in the Conservatoire we only "hindered him from composing".'

The fairly obvious inference is that Steinberg himself had had some hand in the polishing of the Symphony, that his relationship to it is (shall we say?) similar to Stanford's rumoured relationship to *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. That may be one reason why Shostakovich has never done anything as good as his Op. 10. Steinberg continued:

'On leaving the Conservatoire, Shostakovich came under the influence of people who professed the musical principles of the "extremist" West. This was in 1925 . . . One of Shostakovich's first compositions was his sonata, written in contemporary idiom and called by him *October Symphony*. Already in this there was an unhealthy tendency to "adapt" the formalistic language for the expression of revolutionary ideas. The most extreme statement of Shostakovich's "new" tendency was the *Aphorisms*. When he brought them to me, I told him that I understood nothing in them, that they were quite foreign—after which he ceased coming to me.'

The truth of these remarks is fully attested by the compositions of the next period—the Prelude and Scherzo for string octet, Op. 11, the Piano Sonata, Op. 12 (1926), the ten *Aphorisms* for piano, Op. 13 (1927), the Second Symphony ('Symphonic Dedication to October') (1927), the opera based on Gogol's

<sup>1</sup>At a meeting of the Leningrad Union of Soviet Composers, reported in *Sovetskaya Muzika*, May 1936.



*The Nose* (1928-9), and the Third Symphony ('First of May') (1929)—though they are at variance with a statement made by Shostakovich himself some years later:<sup>1</sup>

'[On leaving the Conservatoire] I suddenly realized that music is not only a combination of sounds arranged in this melody or that, but an art which is capable of expressing the most varied ideas and feelings by means of its specific qualities. I did not easily win through to this conviction. It is sufficient to say that during the whole of 1926 I did not write a single note.'<sup>2</sup>

This, of course, is simply an attempt to clear himself of the charge of 'formalism'. But the musical facts are against him. The pieces for string octet bubble over with technical exuberance; the Piano Sonata was written under the influences of early Prokofiev (already evident in the *Three Fantastic Dances* and the Symphony), Stravinsky and Hindemith; and the *Aphorisms* are still more Stravinskian. I do not know the Second Symphony, but *The Nose* is full of grotesque and satirical music—as the subject demands. It is all very flippant and piquant and rather vulgar; the parodies (e.g., of Italian cantilena and coloratura) are amusing; but though one detects in the vulgarity the composer's consciousness of a proletarian audience, the music is essentially 'clever' and sophisticated.

Up to this point, however, Shostakovich had developed freely and naturally, though one may deplore his superficiality, his sedulous aping, his general failure to fulfil the promise of his First Symphony. But he had followed his own line, even though it was a descending line and not a very individual one. One cannot say that quite so certainly of his next big work, the 'First of May' Symphony, Op. 20 (1929).<sup>3</sup> This is certainly a much poorer work than the First Symphony, but it is not without

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Kurt London in *The Seven Soviet Arts*. Faber, 1937.

<sup>2</sup>Despite this statement, I give this date to the Piano Sonata on the authority of M. Druskin. (Article 'On the Piano Music of D. Shostakovich' in *Sovetskaya Muzika*, November 1935.)

<sup>3</sup>Nor possibly of its predecessor,<sup>1</sup> the 'Dedication to October', which is said to begin with a suggestion of chaos and anarchy and to proceed, by way of trumpet-calls, instrumental and vocal recitatives, and other more or less realistic devices, to the building up of a massive and triumphant conclusion in which the orchestra is reinforced by a chorus.

points of interest. Like the Second (by all accounts), it consists of a single connected movement, though one can easily trace the remains of the traditional first movement, slow movement, scherzo and finale, the last consisting of a choral setting of some verses 'On the First of May' by a poet who has wisely concealed his identity. The Symphony opens with a clarinet solo apparently intended to suggest a spring morning and the rest of the work appears to be programme-music of a rather naïve type. It used to be held against the post-Wagnerians that they were rhetorical; Shostakovich in this Symphony is mob-oratorical, with trombone-recitatives, long horn-and-trumpet duets accompanied only by the side-drum, and hysterical melodic passages for the entire orchestra *unisono*. Granted that a certain amount of the actual musical material, particularly the bustling filling-in, is recognizably Shostakovich's, as well as the obvious rhythms mercilessly reiterated and the rowdy orchestration (with xylophone well to the fore) and that anything like musical logic is much rarer even than in the First Symphony, one cannot help feeling that the composer is playing a part. He is by nature a wit (or a humorist), and wits do not make good hymn-writers. He tries to be Marxian, but fantastic Gogolian humour keeps breaking in. A stranger hotchpotch of commonplace, bad taste and misdirected cleverness has never been called a symphony.

But the most significant thing about the Third Symphony is its date, for 1929 marks a most important turning-point in Soviet history. The NEP period ended and the first Five Year Plan was launched—with serious consequences for all creative artists in the Soviet Union. Under the Plan they lost the freedom they had enjoyed during the last seven years; they were told that art had 'social tasks'; 'formalism', never popular, became absolutely taboo. Proletkult celebrated its triumph and literary 'shock brigades' were formed to see that authors kept to the 'strict Party line'; indeed the 'proletarians' went to such lengths, and with such dismal results in the field of literature, that in 1932 they had to be sharply checked, their intolerant groups and associations were dissolved, and for two or three years there was a slight relaxation of official pressure on writers and artists. Although music was by its nature obviously less exposed to the winds of Party policy than literature or painting, it by no means remained unaffected. So we find the one-time Formalist,

Mossolov, writing his *Steel Foundry*. And Shostakovich, too, whose early works were also decidedly 'formalistic', composed first this 'First of May' Symphony and then, all in the period 1929-32, two ballets, *The Golden Age*, Op. 22 (produced in 1931), and *The Bolt*, of which the former is strongly anti-Fascist and the latter on an industrial theme, and an opera, *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, Op. 29 (produced in 1934), which is strongly anti-bourgeois. The theme of *The Golden Age*—I know nothing about *The Bolt*—is the clash between Fascist and Soviet visitors to 'The Golden Age', an industrial exhibition in a great capitalist city; the Fascists include a cabaret star, the Russians a Soviet football team with a lady supporter (a member of the League of Young Communists) and the wicked behaviour of the bourgeois police has to be seen to be disbelieved.<sup>3</sup> Of the music I know only the orchestral suite of four numbers (Introduction, Adagio, Polka and Dance), but one can gather from this at least a general idea of Shostakovich's musical approach to the subject. In the music associated with the Fascists and the police and the bourgeois he generally further exploits that vulgar, grotesque, satirical vein he had opened up in *The Nose*; thus the polka in Act III, with its flippant xylophoning, is called 'Once upon a time in Geneva', and accompanies a choreographic skit on the League of Nations. Thus, by association, the musical methods which in *The Nose* merely underlined and exaggerated Gogol's fantastic humour are here given a political sense.

Similar methods are employed in *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. They are not used alone; indeed the opera is an even more remarkable hotchpotch of styles than most of Shostakovich's scores. There is a good deal of serious music in the work. That associated with Katerina, this provincial Russian 'Lady Macbeth' of the eighteen-forties, is lyrical, even sentimental (e.g. her song in Scene 3, 'Once from the window I noticed a nest on the roof'). The music of the opening scene evoking the aimless monotony of her life—'the dullness, the Russian dullness, the dullness of a merchant's house, which they say makes it quite a pleasure to strangle oneself', as Leskov put it in the story on which the opera is based—this music has a vivid, almost pantomimic quality in the direct line of descent from Dargomizhsky and

<sup>3</sup>The action is described at length in Cyril W. Beaumont's *Complete Book of Ballets*. (Putnam, 1937.)

Moussorgsky; there are also pantomimic elements in the notorious love-music. The song of the old convict at the beginning of the last act, and the final dying away of the convicts' chorus at the end, after Katerina's murder of her rival and her suicide, are genuinely beautiful. The great passacaglia entr'acte connecting the two scenes of Act II (the discovery of Katerina's affair with the clerk, Sergey, his flogging by her father-in-law, and the murder of the father-in-law—and Katerina's beating by her husband and *his* murder) is extraordinarily powerful in its conveying of a sense of oppression by an inescapable destiny; it is one of the best things Shostakovich has ever written. But there is also an enormous amount of parody, of rather cheap cleverness in the music. The characterization (and caricaturing) of the lecherous and sadistic father-in-law is genuinely clever and is kept in focus, but Sergey's frivolity and general worthlessness are suggested by frivolous, worthless music—suggestive of operetta or even the music-hall—which is right out of focus. The policemen in the Third Act inform us that their lot is not a happy one to music that is less pure comic opera than burlesque of comic opera; the bridal song in the following scene is a burlesque of Russian folk-song opera of the Rimsky-Korsakov variety. There was no hint of these farcical elements in Leskov's story; he has told it<sup>1</sup> with ironic detachment like the fine artist he was. Shostakovich and his collaborator in the libretto (A. Preys) have not only altered all the values and all the characters—whitewashing Katerina's as far as possible, and blackening everyone else's—but turned the whole thing into a grotesque satire on the old Russian 'merchant class', with a subsidiary attack on the old police gratuitously thrown in. Even Sergey, the under-dog, who is at first not altogether bad in Leskov, is made the completely despicable symbol of a class hateful to good Communists: 'through Sergey's handsome, gallant exterior peers the future *kulak*', the composer explained. But the important point is that the frivolous, parodic elements in the music, the elements that are 'out of focus', are all closely connected with these politically-motivated alterations. It is not easy, indeed it is not possible, to draw clear lines dividing the element of pure Leskov in the opera from the distortions and additions of the librettists, or between the serious music (whether

<sup>1</sup>English translation in *The Sentry, and Other Stories*, by Leskov. (John Lane, 1922.)



lyrical or pantomimic in a post-Moussorgskian manner) and the worthless; but in so far as one can, the two lines tend to coincide.

In the period between the completion of *Lady Macbeth* in 1932 and its immensely successful production in Moscow on 22nd January 1934, Shostakovich produced a group of works including the Twenty-Four Preludes, Op. 34 and the Piano Concerto, Op. 35. Close on their heels came the 'Cello Sonata, Op. 40 (1934), a ballet *The Clear Stream* (1935), and a Fourth Symphony (1936), which for reasons that will be discussed later was never performed. Although he was now nearly thirty, these compositions show the same diversity of styles as his earliest works; the diversity is in fact more marked than ever. Soviet critics have discovered in the Preludes reminiscences of Prokofiev, Richard Strauss, Chopin and Tchaikovsky, in the 'Cello Sonata of Borodin, Liszt, Prokofiev, Beethoven and Mozart. The Piano Concerto—with its curiously constituted orchestra of strings and solo trumpet—is now fairly familiar to Western listeners, and that too consists of 'many-coloured silken patches sewn on a coarse peasant's coat' (to borrow an image from the nineteenth-century novelist Grigorovich); it begins seriously with one of those oddly straggling melodies into which Shostakovich tends to lapse when he writes lyrically, but lapses with the second subject into a sort of can-can. The composer's deliberate banality, his delight in shocking us, reach their apogee in the finale, which suggests a parody on Offenbach by Prokofiev—when it does not suggest a cornet-player performing outside a public-house. It is funny but it is incredibly vulgar. The 'Cello Sonata is a much better work; its first three movements, particularly the scherzo and slow movement, are among the best things he has done. (The element of parody reappears in the finale.) Of the music of *The Clear Stream*, the action of which might be described as 'fun and games on a collective farm',<sup>1</sup> the farm that gives its name to the ballet, I know nothing—except that its modernity involved it in the *Lady Macbeth* catastrophe.

In emphasizing Shostakovich's stylistic patchiness, one must not lose sight of the fact that he *has* a style, that this very eclecticism—this *sort* of eclecticism—is itself peculiar to Shostakovich, apart from a number of traits that are personal in the more usual sense. Despite its obvious echoes, the music is always

<sup>1</sup> See Beaumont's *Complete Book of Ballets*.

easily recognizable as *his*. The reminiscences are not undigested or half-digested 'influences': they are rather in the nature of sarcastic allusions even when they are not directly parodic. But a severe check was soon to be put to Shostakovich's parody and sarcasm, his vulgarity and his modernism.

In 1932 at the same time that the Soviet Government temporarily relaxed its pressure on writers and artists to some extent, it gave them a slogan (coined, it is said, by Stalin himself): 'Socialist realism'. They were free to create, as they liked, *within the limits* of 'Socialist realism'. The only difficulty was to define 'Socialist realism'. To quote a literary authority:<sup>1</sup>

'In interpreting the meaning of this newest catchword the leading Soviet literary commentators seem to admit that it must be taken in a rather broad sense, and that it includes a great variety of styles. But in their theoretical disquisitions they fail to define it more or less precisely even as a broadly understood method, and when it comes to its practical manifestations the position becomes still more confused.'

'Inasmuch as the stress in this latest literary formula is laid on the word "Realism", its point is directed against certain formalistic and stylistic innovations which tend to subordinate the description of real life and living men to formal and stylistic designs.'

Socialist realism 'is fundamentally optimistic, it says "yes" to life, while the pre-revolutionary bourgeois realism was fundamentally pessimistic and often led to a morbid and unhealthy attitude to the world. Drawing the antithesis a little further, we may come to the conclusion (though this conclusion is not to be found in the discourses of the Communist critics) that Socialist realism is potentially conservative, and in doing so we should not be wide of the mark.'<sup>2</sup>

'There are . . . partisans of Socialist realism who insist

<sup>1</sup> Gleb Struve: *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Artists who took a more liberal view of Socialist realism soon got into trouble. 'Realism as we knew it once is merely actual, that is static,' Alexander Tayrov, the theatrical producer, told Kurt London. 'Socialist realism, on the other hand, is actual and future, and so dynamic. Now, just as each artist sees the future with his own eyes, Socialist realism can show the future in the most varied ways.' But his liberal interpretation of the formula soon resulted in his dismissal.

that it must look out for *heroes*, that it must reflect the *heroic* features of the great revolutionary epoch.'

'The statutes of the Union of Soviet Writers stipulate that Socialist realism must tend not only to describe the realities of the new world, but also to *reform* men, to educate them towards Socialism.'

If the practical manifestation of Socialist realism was a matter of confusion in literature, it was still more so in music. Not only in pure music, but in opera and ballet. To this day no one has satisfactorily defined what Socialist realism amounts to in, say, a symphony or a string quartet, though clearness of texture, melodiousness, general comprehensibility, optimism, the monumental, heroism and patriotism are all considered desirable (the first four, indispensable) qualities; Socialist realism is above all the antithesis of formalism, of music for music's sake. When music is mated with words or dramatic action, of course, the problem is a little simpler; yet so little was Socialist realism understood at first that *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was accepted as an embodiment of it. Ostretsov, a critic whose political orthodoxy was irreproachable, while deploring such dramatic points as the attempt to make Katerina a sympathetic figure and such musical ones as the formalist and modernist tendencies in the chorus of workmen in Act I and the entr'actes leading to the third and eighth scenes, could still conclude that the opera

'could have been written only by a Soviet composer brought up in the best traditions of Soviet culture and actively fighting by means of his art for the victory of the new social *Weltanschauung*. In its serious artistic worth and high level of musical mastery . . . the opera is the result of the general success of Socialist construction, of the correct policy of the Party towards all sections of the country's cultural life, and of the deep significance of that new upwelling of creative strength evoked on the musical front by the historic decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of 23rd April 1932.'

The blow fell in January 1936. On 28th January—eleven days after Stalin and Molotov had, in circumstances of considerable publicity, expressed their approval of Dzerzhinsky's *Quiet Flows the Don*, a work of a very different type and quality—*Pravda* appeared with a now historic article 'Muddle instead of Music', which asserted that

'from the first minute the listener to *The Lady Macbeth* : dumbfounded by a deliberately discordant, confused stream of sounds. Fragments of melody, embryonic phrases appear—only to disappear again in the din, the grinding and the screaming. To follow this "music" is difficult, to remember impossible. So it goes on almost through the opera. Cries take the place of song. If by chance the composer lapses into simple, comprehensible melody, he is scared at such a misfortune and quickly plunges into confusion again. . . . All this arises not from the composer's lack of talent, but from his not knowing how to express strong and simple feelings. This is music deliberately "taken by the scruff of the neck", so that nothing reminds you of classical opera music, so that it has nothing in common with symphonic sound, with simple, popular musical speech. . . . It is Leftist<sup>1</sup> confusion instead of natural, human music. . . . The composer has evidently never asked himself what a Soviet audience expects in music. He has written music in code, so disguising it that it can appeal only to æsthetic formalists who have lost all healthy taste.'

The article also denounced the 'coarse, primitive, vulgar naturalism of the action. On 6th February appeared a second article, 'Falsity in Ballet', attacking *The Clear Stream*:

'According to the libretto the action takes place on a collective farm in the Kuban. But actually there is neither Kuban nor collective farm, but tinsel *paysans* from a pre-Revolutionary chocolate-box who depict "joy" in dances that have nothing in common with the folk-dances of the Kuban or anywhere else. . . . Shostakovich's music exactly suits the ballet. It is true there are fewer tricks, fewer strange and barbarous harmonies than in *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. The music of the ballet is simpler, but it has nothing whatever to do with collective farms or the Kuban. The composer has adopted the same contemptuous attitude to the folk-songs of the Kuban as the librettists and choreographers have done to its folk-dances. So the music is characterless. It strums away and expresses nothing. We learn from the programme that it was partly transferred from the miscarried "industrial" ballet *The Bolt*. It is clear what happens when the same music has to

<sup>1</sup> Western readers unfamiliar with Soviet terminology may be amused to know that for some years 'Leftist' has been a term of abuse in the U.S.S.R.



express different scenes. Actually it expressed only the composer's indifference to his subject.'

This official denunciation, endorsed in 'creative discussions' by Shostakovich's colleagues of the Union of Soviet Composers, had the crushing effect one would expect. The composer completed his Fourth Symphony but withdrew it while in rehearsal as 'not in accordance with his new creative principles'. But he was not crushed for long. To quote Georgy Khubov:<sup>1</sup>

'Shostakovich took the just criticism of his formalistic errors very seriously. For two years he worked stubbornly and intensively at a new creative development of his gifts. . . . Recognizing the impossibility of any such growth unless he decidedly and categorically abandoned his formalistic position, and beautifully understanding the danger and falsity of a facile, superficial "rebuilding", Shostakovich chose the line of greatest resistance, the only true line: of fundamental, organic overcoming of his formalistic errors by an intense internal struggle. The result of this great labour was the Fifth Symphony, which the author himself has described as "a Soviet artist's practical creative reply to just criticism".'

As Khubov puts it, this Fifth Symphony is Shostakovich's 'first appearance as an avowed artist-realist', his 'first serious attempt to grapple with ideas of a philosophical order', and his 'first address to a broad audience, and not to a narrow circle of *mélomanes*, in clear, simple, and expressive language'. The 'philosophical idea' underlying this Fifth Symphony, Op. 47 (1938), is more or less frankly autobiographical. 'The theme of my symphony', Shostakovich tells us:<sup>2</sup>

'is the stabilization of a personality. In the centre of this composition—conceived lyrically from beginning to end—I saw a man with all his experiences. The finale resolves the tragically tense impulses of the earlier movements into optimism and joy of living.'

Accordingly Russian commentators see the first movement as a Faust-like struggle, full of self-questionings, but also of memories of childhood and youth; the second as 'an ironic smile over the irrevocable past'; the third as filled with tragic renunciation, with 'tears and suffering' (one is glad to have the composer's own

<sup>1</sup>Article on the Fifth Symphony in *Sovetskaya Muzika*, March 1938.

<sup>2</sup>Article in *Vechernyaya Moskva*, 25th January 1938.

assurance that 'I wrote the third movement in three days'). And the composer himself tells us that 'the finale answers all the questions asked in the previous movements', though the most sympathetic listeners, Russian and foreign alike, nearly all agree in finding it (particularly the D major coda) rather unconvincing. But to what does it all amount musically? Not, surely, to very much. The second movement, which comes most dangerously near to the old grotesque, malicious Shostakovich (and has had to have its parodic element explained away as of quite a different type from the old), is merely tame; the harmonic banality has extracted any possible sting. The slow movement—also a little suspect in orthodox Communist circles on grounds of 'subjective sentimentalism'—merely confirms one's suspicion that Shostakovich cannot write a really good tune. And the first movement is evolved from poor, dry material, and shows no distinction of symphonic thinking. Stylistically, however, the Symphony does show greater homogeneity than anything earlier by Shostakovich known to me, though even here the homogeneity is by no means complete. One notices the old predilections for straggling themes, string *glissandi*, wind solos, and brutally reiterated rhythms, for the xylophone and for the piano (treated rather as a xylophone with greater resources). It is all recognizable as Shostakovich; but it is Shostakovich exorcised—and he was certainly much livelier in the days when the devil possessed him. The devil caused some repellent antics, but he never allowed his victim to be merely dull.

Since the Fifth Symphony, Shostakovich has produced a String Quartet, Op. 49 (1938), a Sixth Symphony, Op. 53 (1939), an operetta, *The Twelve Chairs* (1940), based on the humorous story of the same name<sup>1</sup> by Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, a Piano Quintet (1941), and a Seventh Symphony, Op. 60 (1942), the recently heard 'Leningrad' Symphony. Somewhere in the background, too, there is another symphony, a 'Lenin' Symphony; No. 6 was said to be inspired by Mayakovsky's poem, 'Vladimir Ilich Lenin', but there is no hint of this on the score; then, early in 1940, it was announced that Shostakovich was working on a 'Seventh Symphony' for orchestra, chorus and soloists, with

<sup>1</sup>The English translation (Methuen, 1930) is called *Diamonds to Sit on*. The book deals with some earlier adventures of Ostap Bender, the rascally hero of their better-known *Golden Calf*.

words drawn from the same Mayakovsky poem, but apparently the composition was interrupted by the German invasion and the consequent work on the intensely patriotic 'Leningrad' Symphony.

Of the four instrumental works—I know nothing of *The Twelve Chairs*—the best is the Quartet, of which the viola theme of the slow movement nearly dispels my suspicion that Shostakovich cannot write a good tune. (It does not quite dispel it.) Although written under the immediate shadow of the Fifth Symphony, it is a more attractive work: mainly lyrical, with just enough tang of modernism to give it savour and to make Soviet critics regard it with some suspicion. The colourless finale, reminding one of the dry bones of late eighteenth-century classicism, anticipates the style of the suite-like Piano Quintet. The most striking feature of the Sixth Symphony is its slow, elegiac first movement; the *allegro* second movement and the vulgar galop finale both tend dangerously to revert to Shostakovich's earlier manner, though in an emasculated form. The prevailing diatonicism is apt to run off the rails, but Shostakovich does get a certain piquancy from unexpected juxtapositions of keys (a favourite trick of Prokofiev's). The scoring—with the inevitable xylophone, and wood-wind and percussion solos—suggests that Shostakovich has learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

The Seventh Symphony, 'dedicated to the ordinary Soviet citizens who have become the heroes of the present war', has been described as:

'a patriotic call to arms, with the wrathful spirit of denunciation characteristic of an anti-Fascist document. Two worlds are opposed to one another in the Symphony. One is a world of thought and feeling, of great passions and noble aspirations. It appears in the very first theme. . . . It comes again at the end of the exposition, and it appears once more in the recapitulation of the first movement, where the same music becomes a requiem for those who have laid down their lives for the freedom of their country. The other world is brutal, senseless and implacable. Against the background of constant drumming there are sounds of a martial theme. It is repeated twelve times, not developing, only growing in volume. It advances, yet there is something static about it. Cruel like the mechanism of force,

this music arouses a feeling of hatred, it calls for vengeance. It contains nothing naturalistic, no "war sounds". It is a psychological portrait of the enemy, ruthless and denouncing.' The composer himself has described the rest of the work:

'The second movement, the scherzo, is a rather elaborate lyrical episode. It brings back pleasant memories of happy days. There is a hint of wistful sadness about the entire movement. The third movement, a hymn to life, a pæan to nature, merges into the fourth without a pause. Like the first movement, the fourth is fundamental to this composition. The first movement symbolizes struggle, the fourth heralds approaching victory. The fourth movement begins with a brief bravura introduction which echoes the central episode of the third movement. The second theme of the fourth movement is triumphant. It is the summit of the whole symphony. After a calm, confident development, the theme evolves into its solemn and triumphant climax.'

Unfortunately the naïve programmatic elements in this Symphony are no more successful than those in the Third; for instance, the 'martial theme' of the first movement 'repeated twelve times, not developing, only growing in volume', certainly 'arouses a feeling of hatred'—if that is not too strong a word—but not against the Nazis. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast between this vast, turgidly scored work, Mahlerian in conception and (to some extent) in details of execution, and the clear, concise First Symphony; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that their only point in common is the treatment of the percussion. And whether we consider the Seventh Symphony the result of the composer's natural evolution or the consequence of the circumstances in which he wrote it, it is equally disappointing. To say that is not simply to condemn the Symphony for not being what Shostakovich never intended it to be. Its great outline is very familiar to students of Soviet music. It is an essay in a symphonic genre—the vast and monumental and heroic—much cultivated in the Russia that has taken 'Socialist realism' as its artistic watch-word. Other Soviet composers have cultivated it with some success and one studies their efforts with interest and sympathy, but it is a most unsuitable medium for a composer of Shostakovich's natural tendencies. Whether the blame for attempting it rests on him or on circumstances one cannot venture to say.



# SELECTED NOTICES

*Ruins and Visions.* Poems by Stephen Spender. Faber. 6s.

*Life and the Poet* by Stephen Spender. Searchlight Books. 2s.

While a poet is in the initial stages of obscurity, a reader—and in particular, a reviewer, can gain credit for himself by remembering the obscure name, by spotting a winner. Later, if the young author survives, and publishes a second, third, fourth, and fifth book, and becomes known, the reader—still in particular the reviewer, can best gain for himself credit by finding faults; for there is no sphere of life in which the practice of 'each for himself' is more commonly found than in the review columns. Stephen Spender has now secured for himself a position and reputation, that expose him to attack and ridicule. He has not yet become great enough in his art to be immune from these. I write this by way of introduction, because in the following paragraphs I shall inevitably make criticisms, and make them as forcefully as I can. I wish, therefore, to make it clear that these criticisms are contingent. For we are all under some smaller or greater obligation to a writer who is looking for a solution to our common problem.

There is a class of books—near-autobiographical fiction, and much bad poetry—whose object is less to give help and love to the world than to ask for the world's sympathy on behalf of the author, whose unhappy childhood and lack of sympathy in the home circle force upon him this strange expedient. Such authors are childishly happy when the world is kind to them, and publishes what they have written. The weak ask for love, the strong give it. Is Stephen Spender in this category of literary weakness? Certainly he has elements of it in him. But I do not think that this is a true judgment to pass on Stephen Spender. His weakness, for ever displayed as an object of pity, and even of contempt, exists side by side with, or is even another aspect of, a great desire to give himself—weakness as well as strength—in an act of charity to a world that he sees as suffering, and in need of love, more even than he himself. Faced with the pathos of the world's weakness, the weak individual who needs love becomes perforce the strong one who gives it. That is a profound conflict in Stephen Spender's work, and it may lead him to a profound solution. If he has not yet reached that solution, he has already glimpsed it, and at times struck a note that he may later be able to strike every time.

For the world is the world,  
And not the slain  
Nor the slayer forgive,  
Nor do wild shores  
Of passionate histories  
Close on endless love;  
Though hidden under seas  
Of chafing despair  
Love's need does not cease.

There are two alternatives open to a writer who is committed to this second

phase of authorship. He may publish everything he writes, leaving the sorting of the wheat from the straw to the operation of time; learning from the abundant, and often necessarily adverse, criticism that he will evoke, the lessons that will guide his later work. This is a romantic way of writing, and only possible to a poet of immense initial energy and certainty of his own final power. Its danger is that the poet, who begins by being honest, is diverted from his true purpose, and becomes the victim of his own personality. The other method is to publish only what has been carefully weighed; the poet is then his own first and most exacting critic. He is a teacher of the world, rather than a learner from it. Mr. Eliot is an instance of the latter method, Mr. Spender of the former. The immediate and very obvious result of Stephen Spender's method is that a great deal of what he publishes is not up to standard. He is not a good critic of his own work. Intuitive rather than analytic, sometimes he sees right into the heart of the matter, but more often he misses the point altogether. His mind acts like a searchlight—it sometimes finds the aeroplane, and is always looking for it; but it has not the power of seeing all round.

But Mr. Spender must subject himself to his own judgment at some point. If he chooses to publish books like *Life and the Poet*, the danger is that the occasional penetrating pieces of insight—and these are nearly always of a human kind—will be overlooked among the pages of scanty scholarship and loose thinking. For there are more readers who will find scanty scholarship and loose thinking to their minds than will value the occasional moments of something better. It is possible that Stephen Spender will, at a certain moment, find himself as Yeats did, in such a way that his solution will illuminate in retrospect his present confusion. From Yeats's early work, no one could have foreseen the distance that he would travel, but only the direction. But not all acorns grow into oaks, and it remains to be seen whether Stephen Spender's subsequent writings will give a significance to much that he is writing at present; which as it stands is less experimental than feeling in the dark.

Perhaps this is put too strongly. Stephen Spender has already gone a certain way, touched a certain depth; far enough to assure him a place as one of the best younger poets of this time, but not far enough or deeply enough to make his searchings significant; as they can only be in the necessary context of a real solution.

I now come to the two books; first the poems, *Ruins and Visions*. The collection contains twenty-seven poems, of short or medium length, and is divided into four sections, not entirely chronological, but I think mainly so. Part I, *A Separation*, contains eight poems, inspired, if that is the right word for the operation of unhappiness, by a separation. It is painful to read, because the poet's unhappiness overflows into the poems. It is very difficult to decide, and still more difficult to attain in practice, the point of balance at which the statement of a conflict in words becomes poetry. Some poets, like Pope, resolve the conflict completely, and the poem states the solution, and makes the solution. Donne, and Shakespeare in the Sonnets, have written in the white heat of unresolved conflict, and have made poetry of the conflict. Freud raises somewhere the question of why it is, that while the dreams and symbolism of neurotics is boring to other people, poets use similar material in a way that is universally satisfying. I cannot remember Freud's answer, and I do not propose

to venture upon giving one of my own invention; but only to say that the conflict, at whatever point it is, in terms of libido, or life, must be resolved in terms of the art of poetry; the statement, the words, must be intellectualized, and used with complete mastery; for it is only words that men have in common. Sensations are our own, and only our own—and frequently very boring to other people, unless they can be made general by words. I should like at this point to set side by side three statements of the same situation.

Lightly, lightly from my sleep  
 She stole, our vows of dew to break,  
 Upon a day of melting rain  
 Another love to take.  
 Her happy, happy perfidy  
 Was justified, was justified  
 Since compulsive needs of sense  
 Clamour to be satisfied,  
 And she was never one to miss  
 The plausible happiness  
 Of a new experience.

Here the statement indicates, but scarcely contains in itself, a situation. In the next passage the words resolve the situation contained in them, that [now becomes only the nucleus of a poem.

I search deep in the wells of weakness  
 And I read the innocence beyond the lie,  
 The truth behind the evasive eye,  
 The terrible lost innocence  
 Fluttering faintly in a distant dance,  
 And the truth that stands, and begs forgiveness.  
 Till I drown, drawn down by my own mercy.

The third passage is a further stage of resolution into words.

For how can he believe  
 Her loss less than his?  
 'True it is that she did leave  
 Me for another's kiss;  
 Yet our lives did so entwine  
 That the blank space of my heart  
 Torn from hers apart,  
 Tore hers, too, from mine'.

I prefer the second of these passages to the first and third. The play between the feelings and the words is at its strongest, and it is in this mood that Stephen Spender is at his best, and most at his ease. The statement in the third passage is too neat, and the conflict is dismissed rather than solved by the tidy pattern of the words, which have gained, as it were, the upper hand, and make it appear too easy.

Part II, *Ironies of War*, and Part III, *Deaths*, are the sections that I like best; for the still personal feelings are in relation to the world, and rise oftener to that plane on which the poet is giving rather than asking for understanding. The pathetic and gruesome images of war are particularly expressive of Stephen Spender's own conflict of pity and horror. Here is a passage in a style that Stephen Spender, together with Auden and other young poets, has made the idiom of a period.

Beyond the hot red walls, the blowing  
Of dust on dog-roses in the hedges,  
The meadows weighed with shadows, bringing  
Youths with girls on bicycles, at evening  
Round the War Memorials of villages.

But the more shattered and wounded images of the following passage reach a new expression:

But through their gliding light-streams,  
An invisible ragged sound  
Moves, trailed by two distraught beams.  
A thudding falls from remote cones  
And pink sequins wink from shot-silk screen.

Seeds of killing drop on cells of sleep  
Which hug these promontories like dark-brown wrinkles

Fingers pick away  
Human minds from hollow skull.

The only other poet who writes in the same way as this passage, passing continually from what is in front of the eye, to what is behind it, is Charles Madge.

The special quality of Stephen Spender's imagery lies rather in its verbs than in its nouns, or more simply, in what it does to the reader's nerves and viscera, than in the picture it builds for the eye. This is something that is peculiarly Stephen Spender's own. Sometimes it is used without restraint. At other times it gives life to a poem. The most perfectly achieved poem in this volume, *The Drowned*, is a good instance. Notice such words as vibrate, numbness and dumbness, appals, 'cold tides cut the nerves,' 'The sky rubs bitter medals on the eyes,' etc.

They still vibrate with the sound  
Of electric bells,  
The sailors who drown  
While their mouths and ships fill  
With wells of silence  
And horizons of distance.



Kate and Mary were the city  
Where they lingered on shore  
To mingle with the beauty  
Of the girls: they're still there—  
Where no numbness nor dumbness  
Appals dance hall and bar.

No letters reach wrecks;  
Corpses have no telephone;  
Cold tides cut the nerves.  
The desires are frozen  
While the blurred sky  
Rubs bitter medals on the eyes.

Jack sees her with another  
And he knows how she smiles  
At the light facile rival  
Who so easily beguiles  
Dancing and doing  
What *he* never will now.

Cut off unfairly  
By the doom of doom  
Which makes heroes and serious  
Skulls of men all,  
Where under waves we roll  
Whose one dream was to play  
And forget death all day.

Stephen Spender best expresses world events as experiences directly felt by himself. But in order to experience clearly the poet must stand firm and not wince. A great part of the pathos of *The Drowned* comes from the absence of comment. Sometimes the world's pathos is lost in the personal *cri de cœur*. As here:

Within my head aches the perpetual winter  
Of this violent time, where pleasures freeze  
My inner eye anticipates for ever  
Looking through naked trees and running wheels  
On to a blank transparent sky  
Leading to nothing; as though, through iron aims  
It was stared back at by the filmy surface  
Of a lid covering its own despair.

One suspects that here Mr. Spender's headache is colouring his vision, and that it is not the 'violent time' at all. Nevertheless, this is better than the obvious or inadequate generalizations of a near-political kind that, whenever they occur, let down the poetry:

'Indolent injustice for so long  
 Snoring over Germany, now is overthrown;  
 To face us with still greater wrong.'

Or the meagre paraphrase of the learnings of the last war, so much more forcefully expressed by poets at that time.

'I lay down with a greater doubt  
 That it was all wrong from the start:  
 Victory and defeat both the same.'

The last section, 'Visions', contains poems written in several moods, and in them the poet seems to be freeing himself of the agonizing compulsion of feeling under which some of the earlier poems were written. In this freer way of experiencing the world it may be that a truly poetic intensity will be found, that will give the poems a strength that personal or vicarious feeling cannot wholly replace.

I have given more space to the poems than to *Life and the Poet*; partly because I consider the poems, with all their faults, better than the essay. Also, because *Life and the Poet* is one of those discussions of big ideas in small coin, that is of all kinds of books the least profitable to discuss. Most of the questions raised in this book have been dealt with from time to time throughout history, and dealt with much better than here. On the subject of the Christian religion, for instance, one cannot but notice that Stephen Spender is arguing with only his own childish, or schoolboy misapprehensions of that religion, and not with its essential doctrines, or any of its most able exponents. The divinity of Christ, for example, he finds it impossible to believe that any intelligent person can now seriously accept. But what the divinity of Christ means, Stephen Spender does not consider at all deeply. This is an argument in which I am no better qualified to voice my personal views than is the author of *Life and the Poet*, but I can fairly point out that there are exponents of Christianity, and that Stephen Spender has not studied them. Scholarship is not one of Stephen Spender's advantages, nor would he claim it. But 'those who fear wolves should not go into the forest'. Like Dostoievski, Stephen Spender might seem to be 'weak in philosophy, but strong in his love of it'. In turn, he writes on the poet in relation to politics, religion, the 'technique of living', and the nature of poetry itself. The old story that 'in a world in which the system in which we have lived is collapsing around us' is the real plot of the book. Stephen Spender's struggle to become and to remain an honest man—and more especially an honest poet—is not to be belittled. He is not the first poet who has known in his heart of hearts that 'poetry cannot take sides except with life', and who has yet, as a man found himself inevitably caught up, and even deeply involved, in the current events of his own time. 'It is easy to maintain that poetry should be above and beyond the struggle. Yet the struggle is only a projection of other struggles emerging from the past history of the world, and in other times poets have considered it their task to enter into that history. The critic who says that poets should ignore the present war must condemn Shakespeare's histories, most of Milton's writing, the great tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public poetry, much of

Wordsworth. . . . The insistence on a too great purity of poetic purpose runs the risk of a certain suburban over-refinement.' This is perfectly true. But one does not feel that Stephen Spender sees why. Take his very plausible and up to a point just, contention that 'War poetry' is not a special category of poetry. The violent events happening in the world do not provide a deeper and more significant experience than any other . . . the search for new experiences is futile, whether in art or life. Everyone, even a child, is aware of pain, cruelty, and violence. . . . The fundamental experiences are very simple, being contained within the human mind and human body, and the relations of human beings with each other.' Within the limits of personal pleasure and pain, as conceived by a psychologist, for example, that is perfectly true. But the fallacy lies in the assumption that all experience of war or of peace can be stated in such terms. It is not only the 'violence' of the event of war—or peace—that signifies (even Hitler knows that), but, and this is something that seems never to have crossed Mr. Spender's mind, even as a point to be refuted, the interest, the historic, or even the geographical or scientific interest, pure and simple. The scope of the *Aeneid*, for example, is complex, sophisticated; Virgil deals with events for the sake of their interest in themselves; for the clashes between different conceptions of duty and honour; of contrasting patterns of culture; for the landscape; and the parts played by the human actors are varied, and by no means to be contained in Stephen Spender's narrow definition of human life and personal relationships. It is interest, and not emotion, that has constituted the greater part of civilized activity, and man's mental life. Certainly no one would ask that Stephen Spender should write another *Rape of the Lock*—a poem built up on interest, and style—which arises out of interest in social forms; but one cannot but feel that Stephen Spender's *Essay on Man* would be incomplete. He sees a poet in society too strongly in terms of what he feels, and not of what he thinks. Mr. Spender's poet is a potential escapist, or a potential martyr. His problem is, whether to lay his heart bare to the knife, or to keep it to himself. That may be the only possible approach for our generation, reared as we were on the overblown individualism of the psychoanalysts and the surrealists. The individualist can throw himself to the lions, but his sacrifice remains an individual sacrifice. But that is only one of many rôles that a man or a poet may play in war or peace. Tom Harrisson represents the dynamic force of human curiosity and interest; even though divorced from strong spiritual purposes. Stephen Spender is the antithesis of Mass-Observation. Both approaches to our world have a value, but it is also true that each suffers from its own limitations.

KATHLEEN RAINE

*The Great Hunger*. Patrick Kavanagh. The Cuala Press, Dublin. 12s. 6d.

Yeats made the Irish theatre: by his own work and personality he riveted attention on Southern Irish poetry. Since his death, literature in Southern Ireland has dropped into an attitude of decay and, worse still, of mediocrity. Apart from a few exceptions like Sean O'Faolain, Frank O'Connor and Peadar Kirby (who, it will be noticed, are all prose writers), Dublin's literary men are thoroughly injected with the placid draughts of the commonplace: they are not bad enough to pay income-tax on their writings and not good enough to



infuse hope or vision into a bored, depleted people. The only poet who gave serious token-offering for future greatness was the late F. R. Higgins. Nelson (from his Pillar in the centre of Dublin) not only watches his own world collapse, to use MacNeice's term, but also witnesses the breakdown of enthusiasm and good taste and the steady growth of apathy, besides the ever-expanding middle-aged spread of Catholic censorship.

This is the atmosphere of the soft centre and of bogus middle-class prosperity in which Patrick Kavanagh is working. Kavanagh is a Monaghan man, of the firm, brown, bony Monaghan soil, sliced by the black wind from Dundalk which means that, like all the most individual of the Irish writers younger than O'Faolain's generation, he is an Ulsterman. However, unlike the majority of Ulstermen—the stage Ulstermen, in fact—he is a Catholic and therefore presumably, a nationalist. In many respects *The Great Hunger* is a huge blast of defiance flung at the august Censors and the more narrow of the Yeatsian partisans. The Censorship, which cannot be too much kicked in the pants and/or skirt, is reputed to have threatened Kavanagh with legal action for alleged obscenity in the extract from this poem which appeared in the Irish issue of *Horizon* and entitled *The Old Peasant* (all unsold copies of the magazine were seized by the Civic Guard from Eire bookstalls): the critics who still flounder in the bog of Celtic twilight sleep will undoubtedly resent the stark realism of the piece and damn it for absurd reasons. But it is pleasing to picture both sides weighing up the theological and philosophical causes for the peasant (if not the poet) having more backside than soul!

The peasant's hunger is for personal freedom and sexual satisfaction, two fairly reasonable ambitions for a human being: he achieves neither—hence the poem in its full flow of power. Now this monstrous frustration-complex is typical and true of Southern Ireland at the present time: the country is neutral not because of a positive and pacifist attitude, but because of one that is negative and neuter. The best youth of the country has been so persistently drained for the British Army and War industries that now there is a huge population of elderly, ineligible bachelors and spinsters. If such conditions prevail unchecked of which grandmotherly Censorship is symptomatic, Eire is leaving herself open to the loss of her few remaining fountains of vitality and individuality.

The chief defect of *The Great Hunger*, as a poem, is that the emotional level is too ragged throughout: there are too many lapses into dullness and trite speech, but the redeeming qualities are indeed felicitous. Kavanagh is occasionally beautifully rhythmical and introduces masterly passages of delicate lyricism.

He is also convincing in his moments of satirical savagery.

On the whole, it is a poem well worth reading both for its value as poetry which is simple and direct, and its value as clinical evidence, complex and indirect.

But it makes one feel that the outlook for Southern Irish poetry is almost unrelievedly grey.

Patrick Maguire, the old peasant, can neither be damned nor glorified:

The graveyard in which he will lie will be just a deep-drilled potato field.

And so with the poets. The only solution to their sterile *impasse*—and it is



terrible solution—is that the daily terror of paratroops swooping on Eireann soil be enacted, so trampling down all the Paddy Maguires and their creators, bringing a renovation of the national consciousness and welding together the forces that have brought moral disintegration. In the meantime, Irish poetry must look to the North-east for new directions and vigour untrammelled by emasculated tradition—MacNeice, W. R. Rodgers, John Hewitt and the very youngest poets (such as myself) are unhampered by the introverted loyalties that have fouled the nests of the Southern Irish songbirds.

The production of *The Great Hunger* is good; but then, it should be good at the price. There is a lack of paper economy which would smart the eyes of a London publisher, though the waste in a limited edition like this is practically negligible. Still, this waste is indicative of the Irish attitude, an attitude substantially pre-War. May one dare to hope for a few more such volumes from the Cuala Press before the end of hostilities?

ROBERT GREACEN

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COMMENT will be resumed next month. *The Freedom of Necessity—III* has been unavoidably held over until the next number

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